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SILCOTE OF SILCOTES

THE WORKS OF
HENRY KINGSLEY.

THE RECOLLECTIONS OF GEOFFRY HAMLYN.
RAVENSHOE.

THE HILLYARS AND THE BURTONS.
SILCOTE OF SILCOTES.

STRETTON.

AUSTIN ELLIOT *and* THE HARVEYS.
MADEMOISELLE MATHILDE.


OLD MARGARET, *and* OTHER STORIES.

VALENTIN, *and* NUMBER SEVENTEEN.

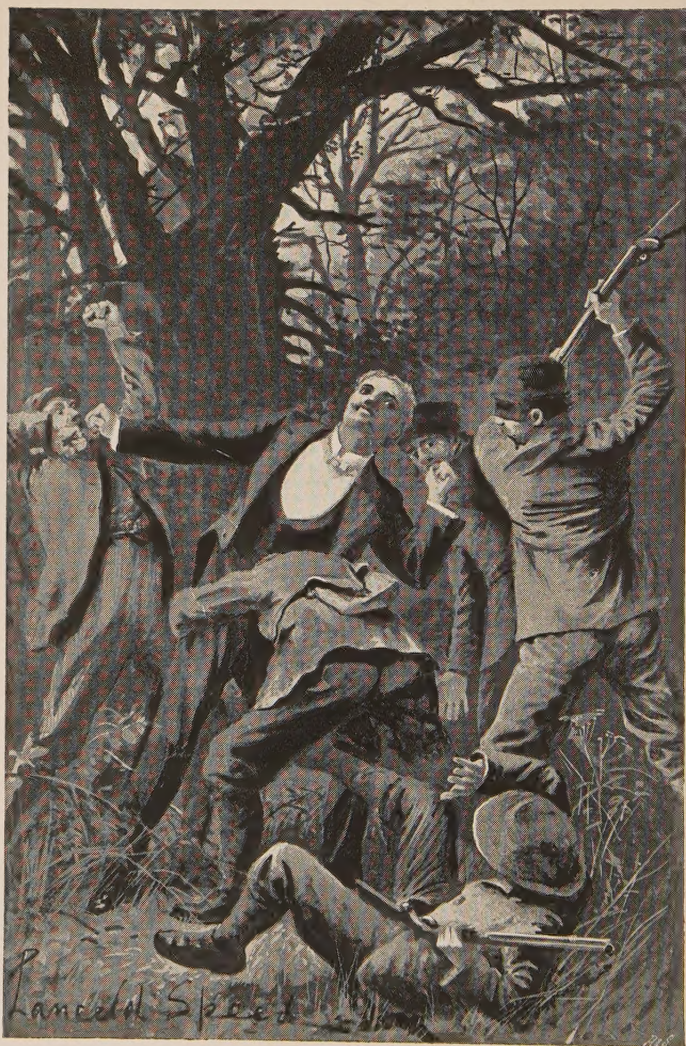
OAKSHOTT CASTLE *and* THE GRANGE GARDEN.

REGINALD HETHEREGE *and* LEIGHTON COURT.

THE BOY IN GREY, *and* OTHER STORIES.



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THE FIGHT WITH THE POACHERS.
(Drawn by LANCELOT SPEED.)

SILCOTE OF SILCOTES

BY

HENRY KINGSLEY

NEW EDITION

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY LANCELOT SPEED

NEW YORK
LONGMANS, GREEN & CO.

1899

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~~FICTION~~

~~Kingsley, H~~

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SILCOTE OF SILCOTES.

CHAPTER I.

MOONLIGHT.

How wonderfully similar are all children to one another when asleep! The same rounded half-formed features, the same gently closed eyelids, the same slightly parted mouth, are common alike to high and low, to good and bad, before passion or education has begun to draw those harder and more decided lines which sleep cannot obliterate, and which only pass away when once the first calm look of death is gone, and dust returns to dust. No such lines mar or alter the face of a sleeping child, or give a clue to the daily history of the soul within. Look from young Seymour the lord, to young Dickson the shepherd-boy. Look at the mendacious and fierce-tempered Johnny, destined to break your heart and ruin you, lying with his arm round the neck of his gentle, high-souled brother Georgy. They are all very nearly alike.

But awake them; see how the soul, still off its guard, betrays the truth in eye, in mouth, nay, even in gesture. Well was the wise Mrs. Chisholm accustomed to say, that the time to judge of a girl's character was when she was first awake. Cannot we conceive of these four ideal children, that they would betray something to a close observer, as their consciousness of the real world returned to them? Would not the little nobleman have a calm look upon his face—a look careless, because he had never known care? would not some signs of weariness and dissatisfaction show themselves on the face of the shepherd-boy, when he first found that his pleasant dreams of the cake and of the fine new clothes were unreal, but that the bleak, wild morning, the hard cold boot to be thrust on stockingless feet, and the poor dry bread, were

most unmistakably real ? while Johnny will wake with a scowl, and Georgy with a smile.

There lay a boy once in a very poor little bed, close under the thatch of a very poor little cottage, fast asleep and dreaming. At a certain time he moved slightly ; in perhaps less than a second more he had raised himself in his bed, and sat there perfectly still, perfectly silent, looking and listening with the intenseness of a beautiful bright-eyed fox.

That is to say, that intense keen vivid curiosity was the first instantaneous expression which fixed itself on his face at the very moment of his waking. In a very few moments more, those very facile features were expressive of intelligence and satisfaction in the highest degree. A minute had not gone by when, with all the subtle dexterity, the silence, and the rapid snake-like motion of that most beautiful animal to which we have before compared him, he had slid from his bed and stood before the door of his room, with half-opened hands, bent head, and slightly parted lips, listening with the whole strength of his brave little heart and his keen brain.

There was no need for him to open his crazy old door ; the great hole, into which you had to thrust your finger when you raised the latch, was quite big enough for him, not only to hear, but also to see everything which went on below.

His mother stood below at the front door of the cottage, in the moonlight, talking with a man he knew well—Somes, the head keeper. It could not be very late, for she had not been upstairs ; nor very early, for he could hear his father hurriedly dressing in the room where he slept, a room opposite his mother's ; and almost immediately he went down and joined the keeper, and the two men passed away into the forest, leaving the woman still standing at the door.

Our listener dressed himself with all the rapidity possible, for he knew that the moment had come for realising one of the great wishes of his short life. His mother still stood in the doorway, and she would certainly prevent his going out, while, if he waited till she came upstairs again, he might lose his father's tracks. The bavin pile was close under his window ; he opened the window, and, dropping on the fagots, clambered down, and, listening for one instant, with his head near the ground, he sped away after the faint rustling footsteps of his father and the keeper.

He knew what had happened well enough. The poachers from Newley were in the wood again, and their good friend, the head keeper, had aroused his father to assist him. The poachers were a very determined gang, with a most expensive set of nets, which

some said had cost fifty pounds, and would most certainly fight. On the other hand, the gentlemen, the keepers, and some of the hinds were exasperated beyond measure against this very gang. The coverts were poor and bare, and the pheasants, every one of them, cost ten to fifteen shillings by the time they were killed. Eighteen months before a keeper had been shot dead. The previous November a young watcher had been kicked about the head until he was reduced to a state of life-long imbecility, varied by occasional epileptic fits of the most terrible character, for trying to follow and identify some men who were killing pheasants; and now the same gang had paid them another visit, and were netting rabbits. There was no doubt there would be a grand final fight on this very night. On one side the Hall party, composed of gentlemen, servants, and labourers, armed only with sticks; on the other, a desperate gang of ruffians from the low waterside streets of Newley.* James was determined at all hazards to see this battle, and his plan was to overtake his father when it was too late to be sent back.

The beech forest was blazing in the glory of the August moon. The ground, golden all the year round, by daylight, with fallen leaves, was now a carpet of black purple velvet, with an irregular pattern of gleaming white satin, wherever the moonbeams fell through to the earth. The overarching boughs had lost the rich warm colour which they showed in the sunlight, and were a mere undefined canopy of green and silver. The wood was as clear of undergrowth as a Canadian forest, and as level as a lawn; so it was easy enough for the boy to keep sight of the party he was pursuing, and yet to keep at a safe distance.

For on second thoughts he did not care to join them too quickly. There were three or four gentlemen among them, and James was afraid of gentlemen. He would hardly have gone so far as to say that he disliked them, and would probably have pleaded that he had seen so little of them; but one thing was certain—he would sooner have their room than their company; and so he shuffled along with half-laced boots, far enough in the rear to avoid any great chance of detection.

* *Professional* poachers are mainly townfolk; and not generally, if you look merely at their rental, of the lowest (!) class. There are a good sprinkling of ten, and even twenty pounders, among them. I knew one well, the rent for whose premises could not have been less than fifty, and was probably sixty pounds. He was not, I believe, at the head of the profession, but was well known in it. He was fond of politics, fonder still of electioneering, a staunch and sound Whig. I remember well his driving the "buff" drag to and from the hustings in either '44 or '45. If I were to mention his trade, hundreds would recognise him at once.

There were eight of the party before him, holding steadily and silently through the wood in a line, and he knew some of them. Head-keeper *Somes* was a fine man, who stepped along from light to shade with wonderful elasticity and determination. His father came next to the head keeper, and his father was a finer man still, broader over the shoulders, and an inch taller ; but his father did not walk with the elasticity and grace of the gamekeeper : forty years in heavy boots, among sticky clay fallows, had taken the elasticity out of *his* legs, and they seemed to drag somewhat ; nevertheless that dearly-loved figure was a very majestic one, or seemed so until the slinking little man noticed the next one.

The next one, the one who walked beside his father, was one of those dreaded gentlemen—a man (as he got to know afterwards) in evening dress, but bare-headed, so that the boy could see the moonlight gleaming on the short, well-tended curls, which clustered on a head like a prize-fighter's. This man was half a head taller than his father, and the biggest and broadest man he had ever seen. It was not this fact that attracted him so much : it was the man's gait, so springy, so rapid, so restless, and yet so powerful. He carried no stick, and yet seemed to be the most eager for the fray, for he was always out-walking the others by a little, and then with an impatient look right and left coming back into the line again. James had never seen anything like this gentleman before, and at once set it down with himself that he must be Lord Brumby, lord-lieutenant of that county, ultimate master of all souls and bodies in those parts, of whom he had dimly heard. Not very long afterwards he saw my Lord Brumby on a state occasion (which happened to be also market-day) in his lieutenant's uniform. It wasn't his man at all. The lord-lieutenant was a little old man of seventy, with a face like a fish, but redder. Once afterwards James saw a fish like Lord Brumby, and asked the name of it ; it was a red gurnard, they told him. Possibly it was better for that particular county that kind old Lord Brumby *was* lord-lieutenant of it, and not that reckless, hurling giant, Tom Silcote of Silcotes, whom the boy was watching.

The gentleman will fight for what costs him so much ; and the keeper feels a natural animosity towards a man who he knows will kick or beat him senseless on the first opportunity ; and the hind, though in some cases not guiltless himself, is well disposed towards the gentleman, whose wife is always doing him small kindnesses, and has no sympathy with the town ruffian. The whole party on the side of the law are perfectly ready for a fight. The other side also are far from unwilling ; they carry firearms mostly, which gives them the courage of gunpowder, they are not easily recog-

nised ; they come of a ruffianly breed, who love fighting ; and, moreover, their nets are worth fighting for. It would be difficult to account for the extreme determination of these encounters, if one did not remember these things.

Such a battle-royal was coming off immediately, as James well knew, and in all probability blood would be shed. The party walked as silently as possible, and he could see that they were coming to a break in the wood, to a little open piece of upland meadow, walled round on all sides by the forest. There he guessed the poachers would be at work ; and he was right.

It came all in a moment. The challenge came from the poachers. "Hold off, or," &c., &c. It was answered by Tom Silcote, who stepped out into the open, and said loudly, but quietly enough, "Come, give us this net here. You all know me. Give me hold of it. I must have it."

The poachers, who had run together, seemed as if they did know him. They seemed to hesitate, and to be inclined for falling back, when the tallest of them all ran suddenly forward weaponless and alone, sprang on Thomas Silcote, and cried, "Know you ? I know you, and I'll have your false heart's blood this night."

The instant the two champions closed, the fight became general. James saw that the fight between Mr. Silcote and the tall poacher, whom he knew perfectly well (the keeper of a beerhouse, the "Black Bull," in Water Street, Newley), was becoming a terrible wrestle. He minded that no more, but ran close in, to be near his father.

Two of the poachers had singled him out, and were attacking him. His father fought strongly and well, but very clumsily. Whenever he managed to hit either of his assailants with his stick, the blow seemed to tell, but he only got a blow in once in a way. In a very few minutes he found only one enemy before him, and he getting maddened, rushed in and cut him down with a blow of his stick, and, at the same moment, was felled with a blow from behind, given by the other ruffian, who had passed behind him.

James saw his father go hurling heavily over, and the man who had knocked him down making towards him. James ran, too. The poacher had got his heavy iron-shod boot raised to kick the defenceless man behind the ear, when his legs were seized by some one to him invisible, and he was thrown forcibly on his back, and, before he knew where he was, he felt two tiny but vigorous little fists inside his collar, and found that he was rolling over and over in the tight clutches of a little boy, running a very fair chance of being throttled and captured.

They must have struggled together for minutes, these two ; the man cursing and threatening, the boy only ejaculating, at intervals, "I'll hold 'ee, John Reveson, I'll hold 'ee !" for the man had time to find that his comrades were beaten, and in full retreat, before he, not being an absolute fiend, resorted to the last expedient of freeing himself. He had spared the boy hitherto—he had boys of his own ; but the gentlemen were winning ; murder might have been done by one of his own party, which would make him an accomplice ; and the boy had recognised him and let him know it. There was only one way : he must escape, and the boy must be left in such a state that his evidence was worthless. He used his fists at last, and beat the boy about the head till he was insensible ; then he rose and sped away.

It was not very long before poor James came to himself, but he was very much hurt, and very giddy and sick. The poachers were gone, he found out afterwards, the nets taken, and many of them (who got their deserts) identified. He was in the arms of the head gamekeeper, who was washing his head with a wet handkerchief. The others, with the exception of his father, all stood round him, and the first person he recognised was the gigantic Tom Silcote, with his white tie, looking down on him. He, too, was the first who spoke.

"This is a fine fellow ! this is a deuced fine boy ! How did he get bred in these parts ? He has got the pluck of a London street boy."

The poacher's fists had knocked a good deal out of James's head, possibly, but not the idea that Tom Silcote was lord-lieutenant of the county. So he asked, faintly—

"Please, my lord, how's father ?"

"Father's seriously hurt, if that is your father. Now tell me, my man, the name of the fellow you got down just now. You know him, you know, for I heard you speaking to him."

"I wunt, my lord."

"But you ought to."

"I wunt tell on him or no man, my lord, not for any man. When I gets as big as father I'll give he cause for to know it. But I won't tell, not on no man."

"I like this," said Tom Silcote. "There is a spice of the devil here. Whose boy is this ?"

"James Sugden's," said the immovable keeper.

"Give me the boy," said Tom Silcote. "I will carry him to the hall. See Sugden home and send for the doctor."

"The boy is as near his own home as he is to the hall, Master Thomas," said the keeper. He is more used to it ; and his

mother will fret. These brats like the home where they have been bred best."

"Give me the boy, now, and no more of your jaw. I am going to take the boy home with me. Go and tell his mother who has got him, and where he is gone. Good-night all. Thanks for your pluck."

CHAPTER II.

FIRELIGHT.

JAMES was transferred from the arms of the head keeper to those of his friend the lord-lieutenant, and found himself being carried rapidly on through the beech forest—every tree of which he knew—towards the hall. He was, so to speak, alone with this great gentleman; for, although they were followed by a coachman, two grooms, a country-bred footman, and page, these good gentlemen kept behind, noisily recounting their deeds of valour, which, to do them justice, were anything but inconsiderable.

James would have lain much more comfortably if he could have kept his bitterly aching head on the lord-lieutenant's shoulder. But that gentleman kept raising it so that he could look at his face, which he did with great curiosity and amusement. At last he said—

"You are a quaint little rascal—a most plucky little dog. I am going to take you to Queer Hall, do you hear, and get you mended."

He said this so good-naturedly that James was encouraged to say—

"Please, my lord, I'd sooner go and see after father."

"Yes, but you ain't going, don't you see," replied his friend, "which makes all the difference."

Soon the forest opened into glades, though it still loomed dark all round. Now his bearer got over some iron hurdles, and they were passing through flower-beds, and then Tom Silcote began kicking at a door. When he ceased, James became aware of more animal life than their own; they were surrounded by five or six bloodhounds, the famous bloodhounds of Silcotes, at whose baying, far heard through the forest, the woodland children gathering flowers or seeking bird-nests were used to raise their scared eyes and run homewards towards their mothers, wailing—

the more heavy-footed of the frightened little trots being dragged along by their braver sisters—all their precious flowers scattered and lost in the hurry and terror of their flight. James knew that these dim, wild-beast-like figures, which were crowding silently around them, were the celebrated and terrible hounds, heard of by all, seen by few, the keeping of which was reported to be one of the darkest fancies in the Squire's darkened mind. James's courage utterly gave way; he clutched Mr. Silcote round the neck, and did what he had not done for four years before—cried out for his mother.

"Quiet! you little fool," said his friend. "If you scream out like that the dogs will be on us, and I can't save you. Open the door here, you asses!"

The boy was quiet, but horribly frightened. He heard one of the party in the rear cry out, "Look out here! I'm blown if the Squire hasn't let the dogs loose. It's too bad." And another, "Stand close together! Mr. Tom, call they dogs in! D'ye hear, sir! call they dogs in!"

But the door was opened, and he and the man who carried him passed into a large and dimly-lighted hall with the terrible dogs all round them, and the door was shut behind. Then James was set down before a great wood fire, with the dogs crowding against him, gazing at the blaze with their sleepy eyes, and now and then those of them which were nearest to him reaching their foolish beautiful heads up and licking his face. He shrunk at first, but finding they were kind got his arm round the neck of the nearest monster, who seemed quite contented. The night had grown chill, and he had almost forgotten his bruised and aching head in the sensation of cold; so he enjoyed the fire, very stupidly, not caring who was in the room or what they were saying.

The first piece of conversation which reached his inner sense was this—it came, as he guessed, and immediately afterwards knew, from the mouth of a little girl. And its sound was like the chiming of silver bells.

"These dogs, you understand, are reindeer."

"That is totally impossible," said another voice, also a girl's, nearly as pretty, but very decided. "If they are reindeer we shall have to kill them, and drink their blood as an antiscorbutic, and you are hardly prepared for that."

"Let them be bears," said a boy's voice, very like the second girl's—a voice he liked very much.

"In which case," said the determined girl's voice, "we should have to kill them in self-defence, if for no other reason. And I dislike the flesh of the Arctic bear; they are Esquimaux dogs, and

must drag our sledges. And their harness must be made with hemp, or they will eat it. You are very stupid to-night, Reggy."

"They are reindeer, I tell you," said the girl with the silvery voice; "they could not be anything else. We have so much pemmican and things in store that we don't want them, but make them draw our sledges."

"None of the searching party did that," said the strong girl's voice; "they used dogs. These dogs are too big, certainly, and, besides, I am afraid of them. But they must be dogs."

"If they are not reindeer I shall not play," said she of the clear voice. "I am not going to winter at Beechey Island, unless they are reindeer. The snow-hut belongs to me; I stole the hearthrugs and shawls and things to make it. Law! look at that boy before the fire. My dear, this is an Esquimaux from off the ice in Ross's Straits, and he brings us intelligence of the expedition from Back's Fish River."

"It's only a common boy come in from the poaching expedition," said the stronger voice, "and a very dirty one too."

This was not quite so true as the remarks generally made by this very downright young lady. James was *not* dirty though rather battered.

"My love, it's an Esquimaux. He is a very stupid boy; he ought to lie down on his stomach on the ice and blow like a seal to attract our attention, instead of gazing at the fire. Reggy, you must be Peterson the interpreter. Let us trade with that boy. 'Kammick toomee! Kammick toomee!' interpret for us, Petersen; hold up a needle."

CHAPTER III.

THREE OF THE FAMILY.

Thus adjured, James, dropping the head of the bloodhound which he held in his hand, turned round. The party of young people who had been talking so freely about him saw before them a little common boy, with a smock-frock, whose face was fearfully swollen and disfigured with blood. Their babble and their play were stopped at once, by seeing a figure more tragical and more repulsive than they had reckoned on. James, on his part, saw before him three children. The first which arrested his eye was a stout, strongly-built girl of about twelve, with handsome, *very* hand-

some, but rather coarse features, a very full complexion, and dark blue eyes, steady and strong as two sea-beacons; she was the tallest as well as the strongest and boldest-looking of the three. Next he saw a blonde babyish-looking fairy, likewise blue-eyed, with her long golden hair falling about her shoulders in cascades—the most beautiful creature he had ever looked on, but quite indescribable, for the simple reason that there was nothing to describe about her, except a general beauty, which was not here, nor there, but everywhere. And, lastly, this group of three was made up by a pale and sickly-looking boy, who, pale and unhealthy as he looked, was evidently, even to James's untrained eyes, the brother of the strong red-faced girl he had noticed first.

It was not difficult for James to connect the three voices he had heard with the three children he saw before him. The golden-haired fairy was the girl who had done the principal part of the talking. The stout strong girl, she of the determined voice, was the girl who had made objections to the original programme of their play, and the pale-faced boy was the owner of the voice he had liked so much, the boy who had said that the dogs must represent bears.

James, for the first time in his life, had the pleasure of throwing the whole of a company (very limited on this occasion) into confusion. So far from acting Esquimaux, and being traded with, he turned his battered face on them, and said in good enough English—

“I know what you are aiming at. But I can't be an Esquimaux to-night. I know all about the Great Fish River, and the pemmican, and the Magnetic Pole is in Boothia Felix. I'd willingly play with you. I'd be a bear, and come growling round your hut, smelling the seal blubber; or I'd be the great brown jaguar, bigger than the biggest Bengal tiger, and I'd lie under the palm-tree, and work my claws, and you should be Humboldt, picking of cowslips, and not noticing me; or I'd be Villeneuve, or Gravina, or Soult, or any of that lot short of Bounaparte, and you should be Lord Nelson or Lord Hill. But I can't play to-night. I want to be took home to mother and put to bed.”

“My dear souls,” said Anne, the bright-haired fairy, to the other two, “this boy is no Esquimaux. He is one of the lost expedition.”

“Don't be silly, Anne,” said Dora, the tall strong girl. “The boy has been badly beaten by the poachers, and should be looked after.”

“Why don't you go and look after him?” demanded Anne.

“Because,” said Dora, “I am afraid of those dogs which are

all round him. Ah! you need not turn up your nose, for you are a regular coward. You are afraid of thunder and lightning; you are afraid of frogs; you are afraid of old Mrs. Halfacre, because the Princess says she is a witch; you are afraid of walking through stinging nettles; and you cry when you go through a lock. I am afraid of those dogs, and so is Reggy. I can't think why grandpa keeps such a lot of brutes about the place."

"You have no business to wonder. Grandpa does as he chooses. And I am *not* afraid of frogs; I am only afraid of toads, which spit venom at you. You are such a cockney, you don't know a toad from a frog. This is a much better place than Lancaster Square."

"That's true enough," said Dora; "but that will never stop me speaking *my* mind, not to grandpa himself, leave alone you. If you are really not afraid of those dogs, make yourself useful. Get them away from the boy, and let me get at him."

"I am not afraid of the dogs," said Anne. "But why don't you call the boy out from amongst them if you want him?"

This was an excellent suggestion, and Dora had not thought of that solution so soon as the quicker-witted Anne. She would have acted on Anne's advice doubtless, had not the low growl of a voice they knew well silenced all the children, and made them retire into a corner, preparatory to skulking off to the free regions above stairs as soon as they were sufficiently unobserved, while James was still left standing before the fire among the dogs. Three faces came out of the darkness into the light of the fire, and two candlesticks on the mantelpiece, towards him; the faces of three men.

The first that of the gigantic gentleman who had carried him home that night—a handsome face with a black moustache on it, and very bold wild dark eyes; not a remarkable face in any way, if you except its commonplace beauty. The mouth belonging to that face I never saw, and it is very difficult to guess at a mouth under a moustache; but the reckless ease of every pose the man made would tell one almost as much of the man's character as his mouth. The next face the boy saw was very different, and the moment he looked on it he knew that he was looking on the "Dark Squire" at a nearer distance than he ever looked before.

He had seen the Squire before, often and often; but he had never dared to look at Dark Silcote any more than he had dared to look at the lightning which shattered the ash-tree close to him, and killed two of the sheep he was minding, sheep not so much frightened

as their shepherd ; or than he would have dared to look at any of the numerous ghosts with which rustic imagination had peopled the great beech forest of Boisey. Lightning, ghosts, and the Dark Squire were the sort of things he let go by with a touch of the cap, as necessary evils ; right of course because they were there, but which, in sceptical moments, he wished were anywhere else. He now saw the Dark Squire close to him, in the most careless manner, and looked at him closely—for the dull stupid aching left by the poacher's fist made him careless about fifty dark squires. Let us see the Squire with him.

A very broad man, of great physical power still, though nearly sixty : with a finely-shaped head (was it narrow ? perhaps it was narrow), covered with close-cut grizzled hair : possibly longer in proportion to its breadth than it need have been. Perfect features, perfect complexion, the face of the handsomest man, for his time of life, that one is likely to meet with. There were two great faults in it : one of natural formation, the other of acquired habit. The eyes were set too deep under those heavy black eyebrows, which had refused to grow grey with the hair, and were set too close together ; and there was a continual look of suspicion about the whole face which I cannot describe, and which it is rather in the way of Mr. Calderon to paint.

Such a man was the terrible Squire. Beside him stood the third gentleman, with his hand laid on the Squire's shoulder, the fingers of which hand were carelessly playing a tune on the Squire's coat. There was one man in the world then to whom this fearful old man was not terrible—apparently one, and, stranger still, this one a parson. Silcote had openly and offensively severed himself from the Church and from any form of faith years and years before ; his infidelity, nay, some said his open profanity, was notorious ; but here was a clergyman (with rather a High Church cut waistcoat, too), coolly playing a tune on his shoulder.

And not a very remarkable-looking man either. Not very handsome, or very tall, with bold eyes like his brother's, face very thin and very pale, and looking extremely young. You would have said, at first sight, that he was a B.A. in deacon's orders at the very furthest. But, if you looked at him longer, and heard him speak a few times, you altered your opinion. He still looked young ; there was not a down on his pale face ; but there was a steadiness of eye, a quiet easiness of motion, as of one who had been accustomed to use his limbs in decent moderation for some time ; a perfectly cool self-possession in his manner ; nay, more than that, a degree of self-consciousness

and a tendency to dictate, as of a man who has lived among clever men, and has been accustomed to wit as well as to argument, which in society might be considered almost offensive; and a curl of the mouth which readily expanded into a short laugh. All these little traits made you, after you had given up your first B.A. deacon's orders theory, begin to think about all the new young schoolmasters you had seen lately, and to put him down for a second or third master at Cheltenham or Marlborough. You were wrong in both guesses. He was the youngest tutor at Balliol.

Not only the youngest, but by common consent, both of the undergraduates, and such of the fellows as had not forgotten the slang of former years, the "cheekiest" or "cockiest." The very first time he appeared in the common room he showed his mettle by his reckless, honest audacity, his utter carelessness of university rank or prestige, and his amazing brilliancy in conversation. Arthur Silcote was, undoubtedly, a success in the common room at Balliol, in spite of what some men might call his self-sufficient impudence. The oldest and wisest of the fellows seduced him out of that same common room that night, and got Arthur to smoke a cigar with him while they walked up and down in front of Magdalen Hall and All Souls, with all the mighty cliffs of stone around them.

"Silcote," said the elder fellow, "will you tell me this: How is it that you, as genial, kind-hearted, well-conditioned a man as ever breathed, are not popular with the undergraduates? Nay more, why are you so very unpopular?"

"You hit me hard. I am very clever, am I not? but I can't find that out. Have you? God knows I would do anything to bid for their popularity."

"Have I found it out? No, I have seen it for the last three years. You ask me if you are clever. I answer, you are one of the cleverest men I ever saw; so *clever*" (pause not long enough to be offensive) "that your cleverness has become a vice. You are too impatient to bear with men, not to say boys, less clever than yourself. You cannot 'suffer fools gladly,' my boy. You are impatient and scornful of all ignorance which is relatively greater than your own ignorance; and yet your own ignorance, like that of all men of three-and-twenty, is very great. You have made a success to-night. Why? because you were afraid of us; you had not time to find out our weak points. You would become as unpopular in the common room as you are among the undergraduates, if you were left alone. Silcote, you must learn to be tender, ay, and to *respect* in a way, ignorance, as you do childhood

and womanhood, weakness in every form. What is the extent of the visible horizon, Silcote, at 1,500 feet above the level of the sea?"

Silcote did not know.

"No more do I. But the eighteenth wrangler at Cambridge would tell us, I don't doubt. You are very clever, and for a lad know a good deal. But put your knowledge against Humboldt's, and where are you? Put your knowledge—I speak solemnly, as I feel—against the Almighty's, and where are you then, poor child? Suppose He treated your ignorance and mine with the same petulant impatience you treat the ignorance of men but little your inferiors, where should we be?"

"You need say no more," said Arthur Silcote.

"Only in apology," continued the other. "I risked saying this much to you, because I have a very great admiration for you, and because I saw in you the germs of that priggishness (you know what I mean) which is one of the curses of this time and this place, developing in you. Cure this. Get rid of that miserable habit of being impatient of other men's weak points as though you had none of your own, and you will be a good man. Encourage and develop it, and your influence over other men is gone. The sole result of your sharp-tongued attacks on other men's opinions in the Union and elsewhere has been to make you disliked and distrusted. Give over this trick. It is a very silly one. No man with this trick (save one perhaps), ever got any high influence in the world. In the House this is called temper; and, young and foolish as you are, you are old enough to know how utterly a charge of bad temper ruins a man's influence there."

CHAPTER IV.

A FOURTH.

THE Squire spoke first. "So this is the boy that you, Tom, by that fellow-feeling which exists among all fools, have whisked away from his mother, and brought here to show me. I don't know which of you is the greatest fool, upon my word—you for bringing him, or the boy for coming. Don't you know I hate children? What have you done it for? If the boy has any claim on you, it was not correct, sir, to bring him here at all."

"I don't so much as know the boy's name," said Captain Silcote. "I took a fancy to his courage and determination, and brought him home to see if you could be got to do something for him. Make him a page, or a stable boy, or something."

"Because he fights with desperate ferocity, is well acquainted with at least one notorious poacher, and refuses to have him brought to justice. Bien?"

"Oh, if you are going to put it *your* way, of course I give up. I *was* a fool to have brought him here, and to *you*. Here, come with me, boy, and we will away out of this."

The Squire laughed. "Arthur," he said, "will you be so good on this occasion, as on many others, to relieve me from the consequences of your brother's folly, and take care of the child?"

"I will take care of the child, certainly; but I will not acknowledge Tom's folly. Tom did kindly and well in bringing the boy home. And don't scold him to-day, the first day we have had him for so long."

"*He* don't care," growled Captain Silcote. "If I had been away six years instead of six months, it would be just the same."

"You only come back when you want your debts paid."

"Father! Father! Tom!" said Arthur, and with some effect, for they ceased what would soon have grown into a very disagreeable wrangle, and he took the boy kindly by the hand, and was going to lead him away, when the arrival of another person arrested their departure, and aroused the boy's astonishment to a high degree.

The hall was partly dark, and now there came towards them a figure whose dress was darker than the darkness itself. Unutterably black until you came to its breast, and there flamed a brilliant star: above that the shape of a pale human face. It advanced majestically, and was for a few moments an extremely puzzling and somewhat alarming figure, before it came into the light, and James saw that after all it was not a black ghost, but only a very tall pale lady, dressed in a black velvet gown, with a very large diamond cross on her bosom. We may supplement his observation by adding that the great sweep of coal-black velvet and the diamond cross were topped by a very pale, amiable, beautiful, and exceedingly foolish face—that the lady, whose figure at last stood out in the light, was very tall, very handsome, and seemed to understand the putting on of clothes, and the arranging of herself into attitudes, without running into the

extreme of theatrical posing, better than the great majority of women. That is all I have to say about her at present, and indeed there is little more to say. Her actions must tell their own story.

Arthur saw her first, and called his father's attention to her presence. "The Princess of Castelnuovo, father," he said, and the Squire turned. The result was a "hip" bow from the Squire, and a splendid, graceful, sweeping curtsey from the Princess, accompanied by a most pleasant smile.

"That was a beautiful curtsey, Mary," began the Squire. "Not too much backing about it. Always remain on your former ground in curtseying; don't take one pace to the rear when you do it, you know. Tread on some one's toes and spoil the whole effect, eh? I remember when I was first presented to old Lady Wildmore, at the Basingstoke ball. She was so taken aback at meeting an attorney's son, and stood on her good manners to such an extent, that she made the lowest curtsey ever known, backed into the fireplace, and in rising brought her old head crack up under the mantelpiece. Well, and where the deuce have you been? Why didn't you come down to supper? What's the last news in the supernatural line? Afraid of the dinner-table's saying anything unpleasant, eh?"

"No," said the Princess, with a charming laugh; "I was not at all afraid of the table's talking, unless it would have rapped out my age. If any table in the house were to betray that, I should take to table-turning on that table, and have the tables turned on it by turning it out of the house." She uttered this piece of simple nonsense so neatly, and with such an air of having said something uncommonly like Theodore Hook, that Arthur Silcote stood in his place for a minute or two, believing that the woman had rather a pretty wit.

"There she goes," said the Squire, "table-turning, turn the tables: turn the words over and over as often as you can manage, and you'll have a reputation for wit. Archy, how many muddy puns can you make out of three selected words, by your permutations and combinations, you know—hang it!—I forgot I sent you to Oxford; a Cambridge man would have told me. I don't find fault with you, Archy. But what a monstrous thing is this wit, this playing on words, which you young fellows admire so.—(I will not be quiet, Archy—she began it.)—Why, is it not the lowest effort of the human intellect? though a man is better remembered for his tricks with words than for anything else in these rotten times. She comes here to pun me down, does she?"

"Father, you will talk yourself into a passion."

"Look at her dress, too. Her velvet and diamonds. Seven-and-twenty pounds for that dress, ordered expressly to meet her own nephew at dinner, and show off her beauty and her wit to *him*, who was only thinking that, if he had known how freely I would have bled, he would not have kept back those other bills, after he had given his word that he had told me of every penny. Do you wince, Tom? The same child, girl, woman, for fifty years."

It all went over her head without touching her. She only said, in her sweetest manner, "Silcote, my dear, you are in one of your scolding moods; and scold away. You know *my* temper by this time. But there is a boy here who has been hurt by the poachers, of whom the children have told me, who must be attended to. I have only come down for that boy. Let me have him."

"Where are the children?" asked Silcote, half ashamed.

"In Boothia Felix, as I understood them," said the Princess. "I proposed bed to them, but they refused it with scorn. It appears that they are playing a game, and have erected Esquimaux huts in the north gallery, in which they propose to sleep, and, in fact, are sleeping. I put it to them that the explorers always went to bed when they got back to civilisation. The children have answered that they are still in the Arctic regions. I would not interfere with them on any account. Give me, however, this boy, and let me see to him. I will make it a personal favour to myself if the servants will see after him. Thank you, Arthur. Come along, my dear." And so she went off with James.

"Did you ever see such a fool as that woman?" asked the Squire, as soon as she was gone. "She pretends to take care of the house, and she has now let all those children go up and bivouac in the north gallery. They will catch their deaths. Arthur, go and see after them."

The Squire then went away, and the brothers were left alone together. "Does he often fly at her now?" asked Captain Silcote.

"More and more seldom as time goes on."

"She never gives it him back again, does she?"

"Never, even at the worst of times. She never replies, except in the most good-humoured manner, with a face covered with smiles. And she must feel it sometimes, you know."

"They are a curious pair," said the elder. "But I don't believe they could do without one another now."

CHAPTER V.

ABOUT THE SQUIRE.

Few lives ever opened more favourably and brilliantly than that of Henry Silcote, the man known in his neighbourhood as "the Dark Squire;" and, as it seemed, few were ending more uselessly, or more mournfully. It is necessary that I should give you some insight into it, and I think it is not uninteresting.

His father had been a great country attorney, agent for several very great houses, as *his* father had been before him; and was, of course, a very wealthy man. The largest of his agencies, however, was that of the enormously wealthy Sir George Denby, the great Hampshire squire, whose wealth, whose name, whose trees, and whose houses, are utterly passed away and gone, leaving but a solitary elm and a barn to keep his name and his wrongs in the memory of man.

The estate was left to the eldest of his four daughters, who married the handsome and fascinating, but utterly unprincipled, Lord Ballyroundtower. In eleven years he had gambled away the whole of her forty thousand a year, principal, country houses, timber, everything but the bare land; and left her a penniless, broken-hearted woman, dependent on her three sisters.

Silcote's father acted as an honest and high-minded man from beginning to end of this miserable business. He used his influence with Sir George to prevent the match from being thought of; and after Sir George's sudden death he tried all he could to stay her infatuation for one of the most worthless men that ever lived. He prayed her to have, at least, some settlement made, but in vain. She proudly insisted on trusting the earl, and the result is well known. In eleven years her half-million of money gone, and she dying, in hiding, in the arms of her sister, in mortal terror lest her brutal husband should discover her retreat, and renew his cruelties, even on her deathbed.

Old Silcote was none the richer for all this ruin. He loved the family and the property, and was probably the only honest man of business which the earl saw in those wild ten years. His wealth was fairly come by.

The fate of the other three sisters was much more fortunate. Old Silcote had induced Sir George Denby to provide for them handsomely and independently, and so they found themselves, after their sister's death and ruin, comfortably off, with nearly thirty thousand pounds a-piece, but getting towards old maiden-

hood. They were very quiet little ladies, quite as good, quite as gentle, as that most unfortunate and ill-used lady, their sister, but a little more wise. The youngest of them married a clergyman of great eminence and piety, but sickly; they had one little girl, who became heir to all their property.

She was very carefully brought up, both before her father's death, and afterwards. She turned out to be very pretty, gentle, and amiable; but not clever. Indeed, as time went on, her extreme simplicity of character gave their old friend Silcote great anxiety, and caused him to glance thoughtfully at his handsome young son Harry, as if thinking whether or no he would not make a better guardian of the ninety thousand pounds than the almost vacuous Laura Denby.

It was the most natural arrangement in the world and it was brought about very easily. For many years Henry Silcote's father had been the intimate friend and adviser of the Miss Denbys; Henry had been in and out of the house as if it had belonged to him. Accordingly, just when he was called to the bar, when he was twenty-four and she nineteen, he announced that he had fallen in love with her. He spoke to the old people on the subject. A certain Sir Godfrey Mullory, who had been hitherto very much encouraged by the old ladies, now got his *congé*, and Henry Silcote took his place. He was clever, pushing, gentlemanly, rich; no spendthrift, but hard at work as a barrister, and, with his introductions to the profession, absolutely certain to succeed. They were married.

Even at this time, those who recollect him say that there was a frown upon his face, which, after his great misfortune, darkened into a scowl, which settled so permanently there that it appeared nothing could remove it. Even at that early time they say that it was a suspicious and watchful face, though very handsome.

They had a boy born, Algernon; and it was not very long before the three old ladies dropped off, leaving her alone in the world with Henry Silcote.

Her health was never good after her confinement, and after a long time, during which they lived perfectly happy, he consented to her going to Italy in company with his sister, the Princess, and a certain old Miss Raylock, a novelist, he waiting until term was over to join her. He went to meet her, and fetched her back. His manner towards her had entirely changed, and the expression of his face had grown very dark. Old friends saw, with infinite pity and concern, this poor, weak, delicately-nurtured lady, in her relations with her husband. He was so terribly, inexorably stern with her, and she looked at him so

pitifully. Things got worse and worse between them, and at last one of the few friends whom he allowed her to see declared that her reason would soon be unsettled. Things went on from bad to worse. At last a catastrophe came. Her sister and his wife were both with him at Exeter in the autumn, after their return from Italy. It is also absolutely certain that Sir Godfrey Mallory was there also ; as was also his sister's major-domo, courier, and friend, one Kreigsthurm.

At Exeter Silcote was defending a young sailor, who was charged with stabbing a Jew crimp. Silcote had been as brilliant as ever up to the time of the opening of his case, which was the last time any of his friends had speech of him. The case was interesting, and Silcote more splendid than he had ever been before.

He won his case, to every one's surprise. The terrified, deer-eyed sailor lad, who had kept those eyes fixed on Silcote all the morning, gave a gasp of relief at the astonishing effect of his counsel's eloquence. The judge, who had very properly summed up dead against the prisoner, looked at the jury as if admiration for that bulwark of our national liberties was not, at that moment, the prevailing sentiment of his mind. Silcote's friends crowded round him congratulating ; but he scarcely spoke a word to any of them. He left Exeter that day, with his wife, and was unheard of in the world for four years.

His sister had some very queer people around her, and so it was quite impossible to say who set afloat the story, which she persistently contradicted, but which every one believed, and which was never varied in the telling. The story was simply this, that Silcote had found out something very wrong about his wife and her former suitor, Sir Godfrey Mallory, and that he had bullied her to death in consequence. That was the story among the many by which they accounted for his sudden retirement from the world, and her death, which followed, in Italy, close upon it. This was the story which had currency in the county among those who cared for Silcote and his affairs, until they got tired of them, and cared for them no longer.

But there was a still darker part of the story, only mentioned among a very few, and always discredited with scorn by any one who had ever known the unfortunate deceased Mrs. Silcote,—a story so dark and so terrible, that it seemed to account in a credible manner for Henry Silcote's extraordinary conduct. The story was this: He had sulked so persistently and so inexorably with her, that she had lost her reason and attempted his life. It was only whispered among very few, and soon died out and was

forgotten. It was monstrous, horrible, incredible ; too much so to make a pleasant subject of gossip among those who had known her. It was soon dropped, even by the very few.

Old Mr. Silcote, meanwhile, shared the retirement of his son soon after the Exeter *esclandre*. There was something extremely wrong, and the hospitable, genial old man seemed to believe it. He lived for four years ; at the end of which time his son Henry inherited Silcotes, and came back to live there, with another wife and son.

CHAPTER VI.

ABOUT THE PRINCESS.

HE had married again ! When, where, and to whom, nobody knew. It must have been unreasonably soon after his unhappy wife's death. Old Silcote, not long before her death, told Lady Ascot that there was a new mistress of Silcote and a new heir, and that the new bride was a lady of faultless character. That was all that was known. Consequently, when Silcote returned and took possession, she, the kindest and gentlest of women, at once called on the new Mrs. Silcote. Her visit was not returned, but her card was, without one word of explanation. The dark time at Silcotes had begun.

Dark in more ways than one, for there is no record of it at all save what may be gained from the testimony of discharged servants, always untrustworthy. It seems, however, to go rather in favour of Silcote, for they agreed that he was habitually kind to his new wife, although she was never allowed to go beyond the grounds ; and, moreover, that she was a very foolish and good-natured woman, deeply attached to him, and fully persuaded that she had gained one of the great prizes in life. She had three children—Thomas, born in Italy ; Evelyn and Arthur, born at Silcote ; after which she quietly departed this life, leaving no trace behind her save her children. "She was a person," said Miss Raylock, the novelist, "whom it is very hard to remember. She died under the full impression that in marrying Henry Silcote, and getting locked up at Silcotes, she had accomplished the aim and object of her existence. Perhaps she had."

This Miss Raylock, now very old, remembers Henry Silcote's elder sister when a girl. "The poor Princess," she says, "was

at the same time the most beautiful and the most silly person I have ever seen. I think, also, that at the same time she was the kindest. Her taste in dress was very good, and showed itself even in the ridiculous dresses which we used to wear in those times. She had a greed for jewellery which I have never seen equalled, and would have put a ring in her nose had such a thing been allowable. She was also very fond of reproducing her father's politics. I remember nothing more about her in the old times."

From other sources we know that she was a very beautiful, amiable, and silly girl, utterly spoilt by old Silcote, and held in affectionate contempt by her caustic brother Henry. Her father sent her into Austria and Italy for her education, and she got it there. Henry Silcote spoke to his father about this arrangement. "Mary is fool enough already," he said, "without learning the folly of Vienna and Florence. She will make a mess of it, I know she will."

She did. She got herself talked about in various ways before she was five-and-twenty, though a perfectly innocent woman. She was grossly indiscreet. When Henry Silcote came to fetch his wife home from Italy, he found her living in the midst of his sister's set,—enough to make any man suspicious. He shall himself tell this part of the story hereafter. We have but little to do with it at present.

At her father's death she found herself most handsomely provided for. She then resided almost entirely either in Vienna or in Italy; and, in addition to numerous other follies, began dabbling in politics for the sake of the prestige which a rich and handsome woman gains by reproducing the opinions of well-versed politicians, and by adding to them the salt of feminine fierceness.

She now became acquainted with two men—one Kriegsturm, her courier; and the other, the Prince of Castelnuovo. Whether Kriegsturm was the Prince of Castelnuovo's creature, or the Prince the courier's, we cannot tell. They both knew enough about one another, politically and socially, to make either situation possible. Castelnuovo was rich, however, and was prepared to make good settlements, and she was getting on in life. She married him, and became a princess, disappointing her brother's prophecy that she would marry the courier.

Prince Castelnuovo and herself did not get on at all well together; and it is lamentable to add that Sir Godfrey Mallory persisted in living in Italy, unfortunately near the Princess. Her name to this day stands above all scandal, truly and honestly

above all scandal. Yet Sir Godfrey Mallory was her countryman and her old friend, and it pleased Castelnovo to be jealous.

Castelnovo was on the liberal Italian side. But in 1849 he went over to the Austrians, and sold his party. He not only did this, but he gave the liberal party the bitterest insult they had ever had. He carried with him to Vienna the Countess Frangipanni, the wife of one of the greatest of the Roman leaders. His desertion of the Italian cause was bad enough, after all that he had said and done, but the degradation of their noblest leader was more than they could bear. His name was a loathing to them, a name at which every honest Italian spat.

What did our poor Silcote Princess do, engaged as she was to the cause of Italian liberty? Denounce and repudiate her husband, who had put the bitter insult upon her? Strike in with a woman's tongue for the cause he had so basely deserted? Not at all. She forgave him, and followed him to Vienna.

The Italians therefore said that her account against him was not so great as his against her. They connected her name infamously, not only with that of Sir Godfrey Mallory, but with that of her courier Kriegsthum, who was tolerably known as a spy. One man, and one man only, stuck up for her a little while, and that man was Frangipanni, the great Roman leader: a man who would believe no evil. But he was silenced, when the hotter spirits proved to him that she had been consenting, for political purposes, to his own degradation.

Lost in character and in prestige as she was in Italy, she became great in Vienna; we shall see more of that hereafter.

Her husband died, and she had no children, although her heart was set on them. She loved children, and was tender to them, yet they were denied her. As is generally the case with affectionate women who have no children, she fell in love with one particular child; and that child was her brother Silcote's eldest child by his second marriage, Thomas. She had fallen in love with this nephew of hers, in a flying visit to Silcote, years before 1849. Indeed in 1849 Tom Silcote had grown up, and had become dissipated and extravagant; although she had not felt his extravagance as yet. It is difficult to tell why she loved him so well, yet, as one of the keys to the story, we must mention the fact before we have done with this sketch of her earlier history.

Massimo, Prince of Castelnovo, died in 1850, after which she returned to England for a long time each year, which time she spent at her brother's house. She pensioned Kriegsthum, and, whenever she went on the continent, travelled no farther south than Vienna. Enough of her for the present.

CHAPTER VII.

ALGERNON.

HENRY SILCOTE, already introduced as the "Dark Squire," had a child by his first wife, christened Algernon. That child was represented first of all by a baby, whose specialities were that he was rather paler than babies in general, and had large eager scared eyes; that he took notice sooner than most babies, but kept such deductions as he had made from ascertained facts entirely to himself, refusing to reduce them to practice until he had verified them further; and so, consequently, at three years of age, was the most left-handed unlucky child to be found, one would guess, for miles round. Not at all a healthy child; a child who did really require a sensible doctor to look after him; who came, by the mother's side, from a family who believed in doctors, and got physicked and drugged accordingly: and the best child for taking medicine ever seen. Indeed, medicine in some form soon became a necessity to him, and, later in life, the principal part of his mild pecuniary embarrassments had their origin in this necessity.

When he was very young, his mother died, and he never saw his father after this. Gradually he developed into a pale, good child, easily kept quiet, easily made to cry; very thoughtful apparently, but keeping his thoughts strictly to himself. Then he became a pale, leggy boy, a great favourite at school, working very hard, but getting no prizes except those for good conduct, which were always given to him without question or hesitation. Then there was a lanky youth who stayed at school late, until he became grandfather of the sixth, in a tail coat and stand-up collars.

Then he grew into the gentlest and best of freshmen to a somewhat fast college: who, although slow, religious, and of poor health and peaceful habits, gained a sort of half-respectful half-pitying affection from the strongest and the wildest: more particularly after he had, mildly but quite firmly, before a whole common room, refused to give any information whatever concerning the ringleaders at a bonfire, which had been made under his window, and which he confessed to have witnessed. The men waited outside hall and cheered him that evening. Those wild young spirits, who had only a week before prised open his oak with a coal hammer at midnight, nailed him into his bedroom, broken his tea-things, and generally conducted themselves as our English youth do when anything abnormal, and consequently

objectionable, comes in their way now made full amends by coming to him in a body, and telling him that it was they who had done it, but that they didn't know he was a brick; beyond which what could any gentleman desire in the way of satisfaction? He got on with them. Many will remember the way in which he, too gentle to denounce, would quietly and silently leave the company when the brilliancy of the conversation got a little too vivid for him, and men got fast and noisy. He was in the confidence of all in his second year. When the elder Bob got his year's rustication, it was up and down Algy Silcote's room that he walked, with scared pale face, consulting him as to how the terrible news was to be broken to the governor. When Bob's little brother, the idle, gentle little favourite of the college, got plucked for his little-go, he bore up nobly before the other fellows, who wisely handed him over to Old Algy; and on Algy's sofa the poor boy lay down the moment they were alone together, and wept without reserve or hesitation. So he took his modest pass degree, and leaving, to the sorrow of every one, from the master to the messenger, was ordained one Trinity Sunday, having a small London curacy for title.

During the three happy years he had spent in concluding his education, he had had but few visitors. He was the only quiet man in St. Paul's, and quiet and mild men of other colleges were nervous about coming to tea with him in that den of howling and dangerous lunatics. The lodge alone, with its crowd of extravagantly-dressed men in battered caps and tattered gowns, who stared and talked loudly and openly of illegal escapades, who rowed in the University eight—ay, and got first-classes in the schools, too, some of them, the terrible fellows—was too much for these heroes. They used to pass, quickly and shuddering, that beautiful old gateway, until the shouting of the encaged spirits became mellowed by distance: wondering what could possibly have induced Silcote's "friends" to send him to such a college. But they always greedily listened to Algy's account of the terrible affairs which were carried on in that dreadful place. And indeed Algy was not sorry to recount them; for the conversation of the set to which his religious principles had driven him was often wearisomely dull, and sometimes very priggish and ill-conditioned. There were but four or five of them as earnest and good as himself, and the others palled on him so in time, with the prate of books they bought and never read, and of degrees they never took, that sometimes, in coming back late to that abode of mad fantastic vitality and good humour called St. Paul's College, he seemed to feel that he was going where he had never

been—home ; and was about to get a welcome—mad enough, but sincere.

So Algy had no more than two out-college visitors all the time he was there, and they were wonderful favourites in the place. Algy's brothers were such great successes that the brightness which overspread his face on their arrival communicated itself to many others.

They were so utterly unlike him. The first a splendid young cornet of dragoons, up to anything, bound to uphold the honour of the army by being so much faster than anybody else that it became necessary for the Vice-Chancellor to communicate with the colonel of his regiment, to the intense delight and admiration of the Paul's men, and the deep horror of poor Algy. But, in spite of Tom's naughtiness, Tom was dearer to his half-brother Algy than anything else in this world, and the boy dragoon, though he was fond of teasing and shocking Algy, was as fond of him as he could be of anything.

The other brother and visitor was a very different person. A handsome, bright-eyed, eager youth from Eton, with an intense vivid curiosity and delight in everything, as if the world, which was just opening before him, was a great and beautiful intellectual problem, which unfolded and got more beautiful as each fresh piece of knowledge and each fresh piece of experience was gained : at one time in a state of breathless delight and admiration at hearing some man pass a splendid examination ; then rapt in almost tearful awe at the anthem at Magdalen ; then madly whooping on the tow-path. Such were some of the moods which expressed themselves in the noble open face of Arthur during these precious visits to his brother. In its quieter moments, in the time of its most extreme repose, this face had the look of one thinking earnestly. If people began to talk, the lad sat perfectly still, but turned his keen eyes on each speaker in turn as he spoke, without any change of feature ; but, if anything touched or interested him in the conversation or argument, his eyebrows would go up, and his mouth lengthen into a smile. A boy too proud to applaud where he did not feel, but applauding eagerly enough where he did.

The good and gentle Algernon had never, to his recollection, seen his father, or been home. His father—although providing well, almost handsomely, for him until he got other provision—steadily refused to set eyes on him, although he allowed his half-brothers, by his second marriage, to be friends with him. Algy never really had a home, until he got the one in which we shall see him directly.

He could remember his mother—just remember a gentle kind face, not in the least like (his honesty compelled him to say) the ivory miniature in his possession. He could remember his Aunt Mary, as she was at that time. He could remember very well a splendid officer of Horse Guards Red, Sir Godfrey Mallory, who used to be much with his mother and his aunt; but he could not quite decide if he had ever seen the father who had so steadily and so strangely refused to see him—the father whom he heard mentioned once or twice by young fellows at St. Paul's, who came from Berkshire, as the "Dark Squire." He could not remember whether he had ever seen him; but he could call up a certain scene at any time by night or day. His Aunt Mary, his mother, and Sir Godfrey Mallory, were together in the drawing-room, and he was playing on the carpet, when there come in a scowling, wild-looking man, who said something which passed over the ears of childhood unheeded but which made terrible havoc amongst the others. All he could remember was that his Aunt Mary scolded all parties till she fell into hysterics, that Sir Godfrey drew himself up, and scornfully exasperated the dark-looking intruder by withering words, until the latter struck the former, and, in an undignified and disgraceful struggle, threw him violently to the ground, but the servants and grooms came in and separated them; and that all this time his mother, having caught him up, held him close to her on the sofa, and, when it was all over, and they were gone, continued to tremble so, that he, poor little fool, thought she must be cold, and tried to cover her with some bauble of a rug which lay on the couch. He could remember all this; it was all that his childish recollection could retain; and he used to ask himself, "Was the dark-looking man who came in and beat Sir Godfrey my father?" It was his father. Though he remembered his striking Sir Godfrey, he neither understood, nor remembered, the false words with which the blow was accompanied, until they were explained.

There came a time very soon after, he tells us in his simple way, when they told him he could not go to his mother, for she was too ill to see him; and very soon after a time when his Aunt Mary (a kind woman, with all her faults) came to him, and gently told him that he would not see his mother any more. "I took it from her lips like gospel," Algy says in his simple way. "I didn't know she was dead. I didn't know what death was at that time. She said I was never to see my mother any more, and it was the same as a bit of catechism or creed to me; I always believe what is told me. I should believe anything you told me. And I believed her. I did not try to go to my mother, for I

believed my aunt's statement implicitly. The reason I cried myself into a fever is, that I felt that dreadful sense of utter loneliness and desertion which a child can feel and live, but which drives a full-grown man to the lunatic asylum or to suicide. They took me to kiss her in her coffin, sir, and I complained to them about her dress. Allow me to call your attention to the fact that the most perfect ballad in the English language is built on the neglect and desolation of two children."

His curacy was in a rapidly-increasing neighbourhood in the north of London. When he was first ordained the place was a wilderness of scaffold-poles and gravel-pits, with here and there a fragment of a field-hedge, or some country cottage, looking very small and very old among the new houses lying round in all directions; not, however, that the new houses were of any vast size, for the neighbourhood was decidedly a middle-class one, composed of thirty or forty pound houses. Before he had been two years in the curacy, Lancaster Square, composed of just such houses, was finished, and the church at one end had been built also in all the native hideousness of the period. What with pew-rents, Easter-dues, and what not, the stipend of the church would reach at least, one way with another, 300*l.*—a large income for those parts, giving the incumbent that prestige which it is so necessary for a clergyman of the Establishment to have. There was no doubt who was to have it. The bishop inducted the Rev. Algernon Silcote, to the satisfaction of every one who knew him, from Monseigneur Gray to Mr. Hoxworth, the Baptist minister.

Very few clergymen, at all events, then, hesitated to marry upon 300*l.* a year, and to Algernon Silcote, with his modest habits, it seemed to be a very fine income. Mr. Betts, one of the wealthiest men in those parts, a stockbroker, had been the principal subscriber to the testimonial which he had received when he had quitted the curacy; Miss Betts (his only daughter) and he had a mutual admiration for one another, and so they married, and he bade farewell to all hopes of comfort for the future.

She was a foolish woman, an only daughter, pretty, gentle, and utterly spoiled and ignorant. Whether it was his voice, his position, or his preaching, which made her fall in love with this gaunt young curate, it is impossible to say; but she admired him, and gave him every opportunity of falling in love with her. He did so, and to his astonishment and delight, for the first time in his life, found that one woman honoured him by a preference above all other men. Some of the young fellows of those parts, who were just getting on so far in life as to think of settling,

expressed their discontent at a parson, with half their income, carrying off the best match thereabouts, not reflecting that Algernon discounted his position as a gentleman, and education, for a large sum. In a year's time, however, they congratulated one another on their escape.

She had certainly brought with her an allowance of 150*l.* a year, but she was so extravagant, so useless, and so silly, that it was worse than nothing. She was confined just as the sudden shock of her father's bankruptcy came on them. From this time to the day of her death, the poor woman was only a fearfully-expensive incumbrance.

The bankrupt father was instantly and promptly received into his house, by Algernon himself, with a most affectionate welcome. If there was one man more than another to whom he was polite and deeply respectful, it was to this suddenly broken man, whom he had made, by his own act, an ever-present burden to himself. Mr. Betts was vulgar, loud, ostentatious, selfish, and not too honest; but he was in distress, and Algernon, simple fellow, knew only of one Gospel.

Algernon's health had never been good, and now his wife worried him into a state of permanent dyspepsia, or whatever they call that utter lowering of the system which arises from worry and anxiety, as well as from laziness and overfeeding. She worried herself to death after her fourth confinement, and left him slightly in debt, with a household from which anything like comfort and management had been banished five years before.

But it was home to them. They contrived to keep their muddle and untidiness to themselves. He was always well-dressed on Sunday, and, since his misfortunes had begun, his sermons had acquired a plaintive and earnest beauty which they might have lacked before. The more weary life grew to him, the more earnest—sometimes the more fiercely eager—he got, on one point—the boundless goodness and mercy of God. He gained power with his people. The very extreme party, both in and beyond the Established Church, allowed him great unction. His church was full, but there was but a limited number of sittings, and his four children were growing, and must be educated. So it came about that home became home to him no longer—that it became necessary for him to give up his last and only luxury, privacy. It became necessary for him to take pupils.

It was his father-in-law Betts who pointed out to him this method of increasing his income. Betts was a bad specimen of the inferior kind of the London City speculator. He had all his ostentation, his arrogance, his coarseness, his refusal to recognise

high motives (in which latter characteristic your peasant and your town mechanic are so often far superior to the man who leads him), while he was without his *bonhomie*, and his ready-handed careless generosity. Neither ostentation nor real careless goodwill could ever make him subscribe liberally; the only large subscription he ever gave was that to Algernon's, to his prospective son-in-law's, testimonial; not a very nice man, by any means, a man who seemed to Algernon with his Oxfordism entirely made up of faults with no virtues, a man who grated on his dearest prejudices a hundred times a day, a man sent him for his sins. The horror of his being a bankrupt, the horror of anything connected with dear noisy old St. Paul's having gone into the Bankruptcy Court, was enough to make him renounce all communion with his old friends, and keep himself with lofty humility from the world; but after this, the man himself remained on his hands, a deadly thorn in his side, annoying him all day long by his manners, his way of eating even, his everlasting allusion to his losses, and, more than all, by his clumsy expressions of gratitude, "the more offensive," said Arthur, who had not then been quite cured of priggishness, "because they are sincere."

Betts's very numerous faults were more those of education and training than of nature; for if one cannot believe that some natures are more difficult to spoil than others, and that the *whole* business is a mere result of the circumstance of a man's bringing up, one would be getting near to believe nothing at all. The man's nature was not a bit changed because Algernon in his treatment of him scrupulously followed the directions given in the Sermon on the Mount. His nature remained the same, but all his old landmarks of riches and respectability had been swept away by his bankruptcy, and immediately after he saw, with his eyes cleared from all cobwebs, while in a state of humiliation, a man who acted on a law he had never recognised, hardly ever heard of: the pure law of Christianity. Not that he ever fully recognised the fact: perhaps he was too old. To the very last, while alluding to Algernon, he would say, "Sir, my son-in-law is the most perfect gentleman I ever saw, and a sincere Christian, sir. Yes, sir, a most sincere Christian, I give you my honour."

When Algernon, for the first time in his life, found that he was actually pushed for money; when he found that the weekly bills were increasing, without the means of paying them; that, although Reginald might be kept from school a little longer, yet his darling eldest born, Dora, was growing vulgar, and imitating in her talk the maids, with whom she spent four-fifths of the day, instead of

him, with whom she spent about one-fifth; then he thought it time to consult his father-in-law, whose knowledge of the world, he put it to him, might be most valuable.

"You see," he said, "that I am a mere child; I really am. Such small intellectual vigour as I possess" (he used this style of talk to Betts: he would have spoken very differently to a university man) "is used up by my sermons. I ask you—you will smile at my simplicity—what does a man in my position do to increase his income?"

"Are you quite sure," said Mr. Betts, somewhat huskily, "that you would do better *by* increasing your income?"

"It is absolutely necessary, I fear, my dear sir," said Algernon. "I must have a good governess for Dora. Our confidence is mutual, I believe, and I cannot conceal from you the fact that, unless Dora has some lady to superintend her education—well, I will cut it short—in fact she will not grow up a lady herself."

"Who the deuce wants her to be a lady? She won't have any money."

"My dear sir——"

"I brought up my girl for a lady, and she was no good, at least to you. I don't believe in girls, without one tithe of the prospects she had when you married her, being brought up as ladies. Governessing ain't any good, I tell you—they never make one and a half per cent. on the money spent on their education; and the flower-making ain't much good now. They say the women are going to take to the law writing, but a friend of mine in the business says they'll never come to it. Try that. But, Lord! see the various games I have tried to make a little money, and ease you. And see my success. I am a burden on you still."

"You are no burden, my dear friend. Even if you ever had been, you could repay the whole of your obligation by pointing out to me the way to increase my income. I *must* have my children educated as gentlemen and ladies, and Reggy *must* go to school."

"Must he? I never went to school, but here I am, say you. Well, I won't dispute; but, knowing what I do know, I'd apprentice him to a smith. Look here: your education cost two thousand pounds, first and last, and I don't deny that the investment was a good one. Three hundred a year for two thousand is a good investment. But then your friends had the money, and you turned out well, and you had luck in getting this church; whereas, in the case of Reggy, you ain't got the money, and he may turn out bad (which is deuced likely), and you nor

no other man can be answerable for his luck. Therefore, I say, apprentice him to the smith's trade."

"I could not dream of such a thing."

"Of course you couldn't. You're a gentleman, and I'll speak up for gentlemen as long as I live. But gentlemen—I mean such as you—never do any good for themselves; you know swells, don't you?"

"Do you mean noblemen?"

"Of course I do."

"Yes, I know a few noblemen; I think I know a good many noblemen. At Paul's we were very intimate with Christchurch, and I was popular in both places; but what then?"

"Why, this: why do you send these swells away when they seek you? Why, the day before yesterday, while I was at the parlour window, and you in your study, up comes the Marquis of Bangor, hunting you out as if you were a fox. And you gave him, 'Not at home'; and I heard him say, 'Dash it all, I should like to find him again,' or something of that sort. And I went to the stationer's and hunted him up in the Peerage. Patron of nine livings. And I got the Clergy List, and I found two of the incumbents instituted before Waterloo; and then you come to ask me how to increase your income. Three words of common civility to Lord Bangor would make you a rich man."

"Yes, but," said Algernon, "you see I couldn't say them—more particularly now you have told me that two of his livings are likely to drop in. Don't you see?"

Betts couldn't see that at all.

"I'll try to explain. I used to know Lord Bangor as an equal. It became my painful duty on one occasion to rebuke Lord Bangor, openly and publicly, for speaking in a way which I did not approve of. I never did so to any other man, for my custom was to leave the room when talk began to get fast and wild. That he has respected me ever since is nothing. Is this the man to whom you would have me go and truckle for a living?"

"I can't understand this sort of thing," said Betts. "But you are familiar with other noblemen."

"I am not familiar with any. I cannot bring them here; I cannot."

"Well, you know best," said Betts. "I thought swells were swells, and were to be used accordingly. Otherwise what is the good of them? If you are going in this line, *you* must take pupils. There is the Rev. George Thirlwall takes three, at two hundred a year a-piece. There's six hundred for you, barring their keep."

"Yes; but then Thirlwall was a Balliol scholar, and got a double first. He can command such a price. I doubt, as a mere pass man, whether I should get any pupils at all."

"But his education did not cost any more than yours."

"Rather less, I should think. He got his scholarship and his fellowship. I never got anything better than a good-conduct prize. I have not the brains."

"That's a rum thing," pondered Betts, aloud. "He ain't half such a good fellow as you, and a stick in the pulpit. Hang education, I say. I don't see my way to the interest on my money. And I've been a bold man, too—too bold, as your pocket can tell for this many a year, sir. It was the Illinois Central finished me at last, but the Illinois Central seems to me safe alongside of a university education. However, if you are bent against the law writing and blacksmithing, and against the using of swell friends, so strong, you must try for pupils. Unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you would try your father, sir."

"I tried him long ago," said Algernon.

"And it didn't do?"

"Oh, dear no; not in the least. Far from it."

CHAPTER VIII.

PAR NOBILE FRATRUM.

ALGERNON'S modest allowance of 250*l.* a year had been continued through the usual channel, all through the time of his curacy, but, when he entered on the duties of his incumbency, he was informed by his father's lawyer that it would be discontinued. He submitted, with a sigh, without remonstrance or remark, and gave up all hope of assistance from that quarter. It was not that he proudly made any resolution against accepting it; it merely seemed to him utterly improbable that such help would ever be offered, and utterly impossible that he should ever ask for it.

But many apparent impossibilities have been done for the sake of children. When he began to see that he was poor, and getting poorer, the thought of their future was quite enough to set aside any lingering feelings of pride or fear, had any such been there.

He put his case through his lawyer, and was refused. Old Silcote wished it to be understood that he could hold no further communication with Mr. Algernon Silcote.

Once, not long after this, the children fell ill of measles, or some childish disorder, and a sad time the poor widower had with them, and was still thanking God that they were on the mend, and that he had lost none of his precious little incumbrances, when a message came from Silcotes, ordering the children to be sent there for change of air, until they recovered their health. The message came through Silcote's lawyer, and was given in as ill-conditioned a manner as need be, but Algernon had no "proper spirit" whatever. He thankfully sent the children off, and they were kept there for above two months. He was very thankful. "The ban then is not to descend to the next generation," he said. He thanked God for it.

The younger of his two visitors at Oxford, the bright-eyed young Arthur, now grown to be the man we saw him at Silcotes the night of the poaching affray, paid him frequent visits as of yore. It was he who brought the children back from Silcotes, with new clothes, new toys, new roses in their cheeks, and, alas, new wants, and a new discontent at the squalid and untidy home to which they had returned. Arthur, who noticed everything, noticed Miss Dora turning up her nose at several things, and heard one or two petulant remarks from her in strong disparagement of the *ménage* at No. 20, Lancaster Square; and he said with his usual decision, "I shall stay a few days with you, Algy. Dora, you are tired with your journey, and consequently cross and disagreeable. Go to bed. No, leave your doll here. I want it."

Dora obeyed, reddening. "I'll stay a day or two, and whip these children in. They have been most awfully spoilt by that very foolish aunt of ours. You will require the aid of my influence for a short time, until hers has become a thing of the past. What a noble child that Dora is! Every element of good about her. She has a will, and requires to have it controlled by a stronger one. But she is a sweet child."

"Dora," said Algernon, with perfect good faith, "reminds me, in all her ways, of her mother."

Arthur was just going to rap out in his short way, "Lord forbid." But he neither did that, nor what he felt inclined to do a moment afterwards—burst out laughing: he was getting that tongue of his under command by now.

"Well, she is a very sweet child, and Reggy is another. Reggy is an artist. Reggy will do great things in art. Reggy will be a Royal Academician, if those old dunderheads can ever be got to

overcome their inveterate jealousy against anything approaching to talent and originality."

Algy answered in commonplaces, not quite knowing what words he was uttering, for he was confusedly wondering how an undergraduate could have such wonderful intuition about an art of which he was entirely ignorant, as to see a future Royal Academician in a child of nine, whose efforts hitherto had been certainly below the average. But it was only Arthur, he thought again with a smile, —Arthur the omniscient.

Arthur went on. "I love and admire everything you do, but I never admired you more than when you gave up your pride, and allowed these children to pay this visit."

"I have no pride, Archy," said Algernon. "And, if I had, I could not display it in that quarter."

Arthur looked at him keenly, and asked, "Why?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Do you mean on general grounds—on the ground that you have no right to be proud to your own father—or that you have no right to stand in your children's light? Or are there other grounds for your not being proud?"

"The reasons," said Algernon, "on which I acted in sending my children to their grandfather at Silcotes were just such as you have suggested: that I had no right to be proud to my own father, and that I should be wicked to stand in my children's light. You asked me then if there were other reasons why I should show no pride in that quarter. I answer that there are. We must understand one another, at least partially, my dearest Arthur, even if that partial understanding aids in our separation. I know that it is to your good offices that I owe this recognition of my children. Utter the question which I see hanging on your lips."

"I'll utter it, Algy, though all the powers of the Inferno shall never make me believe in you as anything but the best man who ever walked. Here it is. Did you, before Tom or I remember, ever—well—make a fiasco?"

"Never! To you I will say the simple truth. Though I'm not strong in brain, and have that want of energy which comes from habitual ill-health, yet I have lived as blameless a life as any of us poor sinners can hope to lead."

"Then what has caused this terrible injustice of my father towards you?"

"He has not been unjust. He has been most generous. Question on, and let us have it out."

"Has his extraordinary treatment of you arisen from any facts in connection with your mother?"

"Yes. I will now finish this conversation, and we will never resume it. I was put in possession of certain facts when I was seventeen. Now ask yourself, but never ask me, what has made me grey at six-and-thirty, and has produced in my father that never-ending thought about self, and distrust of others, which has made him very little better than a lunatic."

CHAPTER IX.

MISS LEE.

ON this occasion Arthur pointed out to Dora what he was pleased to call the extreme meanness of her conduct towards her father, in making disparaging comparisons between his house and her grandfather's. Dora received her scolding with perfect composure and silence, replying not one word, but looking steadily at him with her hands behind her back. Though she did not confess her fault, yet she never repeated it. Their visits to Silcotes took place every year after this. The old man ordered it, and every one obeyed; but Dora, honest little story-teller as she was, always, on her return home, used audibly to thank Heaven that she was back in her own place once more, and to vilipend and ridicule the whole *ménage* of Silcotes most entirely. The other children used generally to roar all through the night after their return, and to be unmanageable for the next week.

Two pupils were got—dough-faced, foolish youths, who had made so little use of their schooling that their matriculation examination was considered more than doubtful, and so they were, with the wisdom of some parents, taken from experienced hands at school, and sent into the inexperienced hands of Algernon. That he did his duty by them, and got them through, I need not say; but it was on the strength of these pupils that he engaged a governess.

Miss Lee was a foolish Devonshire young person, whose father had been a clergyman, and, as she always averred, kept hounds. She also held up her head, as being a cousin of Mr. Lee of Basset, whose wealth her imagination compared favourably with that of Silcote. The hounds were quite possible, for he left her destitute, and with no education, and so it became necessary for her to go out as a governess. She was not in the least fit for it, and

Algernon, of course, could only offer the most modest stipend. So they naturally came together from the extreme ends of England. Miss Lee, in addition to the disqualifications of ignorance and not very refined manners, had another disqualification, considered in some families, and for good reason, to be greater than either of the others. She, like so many Devonshire girls, was amazingly beautiful.

Such, in the main, and given as shortly as possible, so as to avoid being duller than was necessary, is the information I had gained from Miss Raylock, Arthur, Algernon, and others, about the Silcote family, as they were at the time of the children's third visit—the time of the poaching raid described in the first chapter. This coincided with the fourth time that Captain Tom Silcote had got leave of absence from duty, for the purpose of coming home, and representing one-half of his debts as the whole, and, with a sort of recollection of his Catechism, promising to lead a new life, and be in charity with all men. The debts which he confessed to his father were always paid—for was not he the heir? and he always went back to lead the old life over again, and to hate his unsatisfied creditors with all the hatred of a gentleman living habitually beyond his means.

CHAPTER X.

THE SQUIRE INVADES MRS. SUGDEN'S TERRITORY AND GETS BEATEN.

DOISEY is a great sheet of rolling woodland four or five miles square, which in two points, close together, heaves itself up so high as to be a landmark for several counties. The greater, and all the highest part of it, is unbroken beech forest; but, as you come lower, it begins to get broken open by wild green lanes, tangled fantastically at their sides by bramble, sweet briar, wild rose, and honeysuckles, by which a few solitary cottages stand here and there; picturesque cottages generally, standing alone, and not stinted for garden ground. As you get lower the fields become more frequent and larger, and you are among farms, generally embosomed in dense clusters of dark and noble elms; below this steep fields stoop suddenly down to the level of the broad river meadows, and around three-fifths of the circle winds

the Thames—by day a broad river of silver ; in some evenings, when the sun has just sunk behind the dark dim wolds of Oxfordshire, a chain of crimson pools.

Dim mysterious wolds are those of Oxfordshire across the river ; rolling, hedgeless, uncultivated chalk down, capped always by the dark level bars of woodland : a land of straight though somewhat lofty lines, with no artistic incident for miles, in strong contrast to the fantastic prettiness of the elm hedgerows of the neighbouring Berkshire. A very melancholy piece of country, almost as melancholy as some of the warren lands in Norfolk, or one suspects of Lincolnshire, else why did a Lincolnshire man write—

“ When from the dry dark wold the summer airs blow cool
On the oat grass and the sword grass, and the bulrush in the pool ? ”

—two of the most beautiful and melancholy lines in our language, more than worthy of Wordsworth. A lonely, dim-looking county that Oxfordshire, as that dreaming little shepherd lad, James Sugden, saw it month after month, year after year, in his solitary watch over the sheep among the highest fields of the beautiful Boisey, or from the door of his father's cottage, highest up among the towering beechwood, when merry haymaking and merrier harvest were over, and the September sun was blazing down due west.

The boy had got some considerable education. Educate a boy loosely, and set him to tend sheep, and, if he does not develop his imaginative powers, you may be pretty sure he has not got any. This boy was imaginative enough for a poet ; only he wanted wits and application, without which no poet or any one else can possibly do anything, and he used to dream about these Oxfordshire wolds. To his left, as he sat at his father's door, was a view much more interesting than the one towards Oxfordshire ; Reading, six miles off, lay almost at his feet, and, above the towers and the smoke, on a clear day, rose a dim blue mountain, crowned with dark trees ; Siddon, his mother told him, at whose bases lived Lord P—— and Lord C——, greater lords than Lord A——, almost as great as the ultimate lord of the great hanging woods of Clevedon. All this was very fine, but he always preferred the desolate wolds to the west, more particularly after his father had told him one evening, in confidence, when they were eating their poor supper together in the garden, under the falling dew and the gathering night, that just beyond those darkening wolds lay the most beautiful city in the whole world.

"How far off?" asked the boy.

"Fifteen mile, across through Ipsden. A matter of eight-and-twenty by Benson and Dorchester."

"It isn't Seville, is it? Of course it is not. But Seville is the finest town in the world."

"Oxford beats it hollow, I tell you."

"Have you seen them both?"

"Yes. Leastways, I know one on 'em well, and that's quite enough to give me a right to speak. If you want to know both sides of a question before you speaks about it, everlasting dumbness will be your portion. Whatever you've got to say, old fellow, rap it out, hard and heavy, and see what the other fellow has got to say. If he has the best of it, give in; if he hasn't, shut him up. But don't believe that you are in the right, for all that; only believe that he is a greater fool than you. So you see, old fellow, I say again that Oxford is a finer town than the one you named. We'd best get to bed, old chap, hadn't we?"

Looking from the door of his father's cottage, he could see the top of the chimneys of Silcotes below him among the trees. A fine old place, Silcotes, say 1650, a foursquare place of endless gables of brick—the great addition made by the present squire's father (who may almost be said to have built it over again) being in perfect harmony with the old seventeenth century nucleus which he found. These additions had been made so long, that the newer bricks, with the assistance of cunning washes, had toned down to the colour of the older building, so that it required an architect's eye to tell new from old. A most harmonious house—for, in fact, the elder Silcote's architect, with a taste rare in those later years of that century, had carefully and painfully fulfilled the original design of the seventeenth century architect, whose work had probably been stopped by the Revolution, and who may, before he patched up and finished, have heard the cannonading from old Basing House, booming up from the S.W. from behind Bearwood.

It was a very beautiful place, and very beautifully kept up. If you went into the stables you would see the master's eye, or his stud-groom's eye, in the very straw plait which edged the litter; a Dunstable bonnet was only a slight improvement on it. If you went to the other end of the *ménage*, if you went to look round the flower-garden, you would see the managing eye there also; terrace after terrace of the newest and finest flowers—lobelias, calceolarias, geraniums, and what not—piling themselves up in hideous incongruous patterns, until, in their sheer

confusion, they became almost artistic; and then, above all, the great terrace of roses, which flushed up with nearly a year-long beauty, and then, clinging to the house itself, hung the deep dark porch, the only solecism in the house, with festoons of *Jaune d'Espray*, and *Dundee Rambler*, and, ever climbing, hung magnificent trophies of *Blairii No. 2*, and *Gloire de Dijon*, at every coign of vantage in the long façade.

"Six thousand a year in housekeeping, and no company worthy of being so called ever seen." That was what the Princess of Castelnovo used to tell Miss Raylock, and the Princess should have known, for she was housekeeper. About the "company" she was undoubtedly right; with regard to the six thousand a year, why you must generally divide that lady's statements by two, and then be very careful to examine closely the facts on which was based the remaining half of her assertion. There is, however, no doubt that this fine house of Silcotes, even in these dark times, was kept up with amazing liberality; and the very servants who left it of their own accord would tell you, almost pathetically, that they had never had anything to complain of, and that there was not such a servant's hall as Silcote's for miles round.

For, in spite of the liberality of Silcote's housekeeping, servants would not stay with him. There was no society and no change,—things which servants desire even more than good living. If you think that the footman in plush breeches, or the groom in white, is a mere machine, you are mistaken. If you think that the mere paying of these men's wages, and feeding them well, will secure these men, you are again mistaken. My lord or the squire cannot destroy these men's individuality, when they dress them in the clothes of the eighteenth century. Necessity may keep them quiet; good living and gaiety may keep them contented; but if they get bored, they will "better" themselves as sure as possible, even at lower wages, and worse beer.

However, Silcote's servants never stayed. Their formula was, "that a man was not sent into the world to die of the blues," and I am sorry to say that in self-justification they set abroad, through the county, an account of the Dark Squire's eccentricities a great deal darker than the mere truth.

The ultimate fate of little James Sugden, on the night of the poaching affray was this. The Princess had him plastered and mended as far as was possible, and then, having done her "possible," handed him over to the butler, who proceeded towards the men's quarters to see if he could get him a bed.

Those who were asleep were immovable, and those who were

awake objected so very strongly, and in such extremely pointed language, that he did not dare to push his point; at last, getting tired of argument, he used his authority where he dared, and quartered him on the youngest stable-boy. At sunrise James was on the alert, dressed, and ready to make his escape home.

Which was the way, and where were the dogs? His companion told him the way, but could give no information about the dogs. They might be still loose; *he* would not venture beyond the stable yard for ten pounds till he knew they were kennelled. But the intense wish the boy had to be at home again overcame his fears, and he resolved to go. He had all the dislike which a dog or a child has, at first, to strange faces and places, and he dreaded seeing any folks in authority for fear they should bid him stay, in which case he knew he must obey. He fled. One terrible fright he had; he opened a door in the wall, and, when he had shut it behind him, he found himself alone among the bloodhounds. His terror was simply unutterable at this moment; but the dogs knew him, and proposed to come with him, and he, afraid to drive them back, was escorted by them as far as a gate, beyond which they would not come. Once out of sight of them, he sped away through the forest hard towards his home.

It was late in the day when he was sitting between his father and mother, looking out over the little garden of potatoes and cabbage, of filbert and apple trees, towards the westering sun over the Oxfordshire wolds. Their poor flowers were mostly fading by now, and the garden looked dull; for cottagers' flowers are mostly spring flowers. In the lengthening evenings of early spring, the sight of Nature renewing herself has its effect on the poorest of the hinds, to a certain extent, and in their dull way they make efforts at ornamentation, perhaps because they have some dim hope that the coming year cannot be quite so hopeless as the one gone past—will not be merely another milestone towards chronic rheumatism and the workhouse. They must have such hopes, poor folks, or they would madden. These hopes come to them in the spring, with reviving nature, and then they garden. The wearied hind stays late out in the cool, brisk April night, and spares a little time, after he has done delving in his potatoes, to trimming and planting a few poor flowers. But after, when Nature gets productive and exacting, she absorbs him, and the flowers are neglected; only a few noble perennials, all honour to their brave hearty roots,—your lilies and your hollyhocks, and latterly, I am pleased to see everywhere, your *Delphinium formosum*—standing bravely up amidst the forced neglect. So Sugden's garden, this bright September afternoon,

was not sufficiently gaudy to keep James's eye from wandering across the little green orchard beyond the well, on to the distant hill.

Suddenly his father, badly hurt, and still in pain, grew animated. "By Job," he said, "there's the deer! There she goes. Hi! look at her! There she goes into the Four Acre, making for Pitcher's Spinney. She'll go to soil at Wargrave for a hundred pounds. They are hunting early this year. Stars and garters! if she don't come heading back! It's old Ahna as sure as you are born, and she knows the ground."

They were all out in the garden, looking eagerly where Sugden pointed, expecting every moment to see Mr. Davis, and a noble cavalcade, come streaming out of the forest-ride. They were disappointed; it was not one of Her Majesty's deer which Sugden had seen, but a great dog, nearly as large and nearly of the same colour, which now came cantering towards them. They had stared after him so long, and, after they had found out what he was, had stood looking at him so long, that some one else had time to come behind them, and while they were slowly realising that it was only one of the bloodhounds from the hall, a harsh voice from behind them said—

"He won't eat you. If he did, he would not get very fat off you."

They turned, and found themselves face to face with Silcote.

All three were too much surprised to speak, and so they stood a moment or so, and looked at Silcote. A compact, intensely firm-looking and broad-shouldered figure, with a grizzly head, square features, and a continual frown.

Dress: grey coat, grey breeches, grey gaiters, square and inexorable boots. The late Mr. Cobbett would have admired the look of him very much until they got at loggerheads, which would not have been long.

He had to begin the conversation again. "You stand frightened at the first sight of me, you sheep! I was saying that, if my dogs ate a dozen such as you, they would not get fat. You peasantry are getting too lean even to eat, with your ten shillings a week, and your five shillings off for rent, firing, clothes' club, and the rest of it. You are sheep, mere sheep. Why don't you make a *Jaequerie* of it? You hate me, and I hate you. Why don't you cut my throat, burn my house down—unless you want it for your own purposes—and subdivide my lands? Bah! you have no courage for a Saxon population. Cannot you produce a *Marat*?"

It was Mrs. Sugden who answered. "You seem in one of your

dark moods, Squire—that is to say, talking more nonsense than usual. You say you hate us, *cela va sans dire* ; you say we hate you—that is completely untrue of us as a class,—the more particularly about you, who are, with all your foolishness, the justest landlord about these parts. As I used to say to the Duchess of Cheshire, ‘Don’t patronise these people in the way you do. Love them and trust them, and they will in some sort love and trust you. Don’t be always teasing them in their own houses, and worrying them to death with impertinent inquiries about their domestic matters. They will only lie to you, and hate you. Come to them sometimes as *Deus ex machina*, and relieve them from some temporary difficulty. You can always do that, for they are always in difficulties. You can buy them up at a pound a head like that, whereas, if you hunt and worry them, ten pounds won’t make them grateful.’ Now, my dear Squire, what is the object of *your* visit ? ”

Never, probably, was a man so utterly aghast as Silcote. Here was a common labourer’s wife, dressed in the commonest print, a woman he had never seen or never noticed before, blowing him up in French and Latin, and most audaciously pricking him in the most delicate and most cherished parts of his long-loved folly, and saying things to him which his own petted Arthur dare not say. He looked, speechless, and saw only a common labourer’s wife, in a common print gown, who laughed at him while he looked.

But she was very beautiful. Silcote had seen peasant women as beautiful, in the same style, in the Pays de Caux, but never in England. Silcote had never seen the very light brown hair and the perfectly sharply cut features of the Norman among the English peasantry before ; and indeed, one seldom does, unless there is a story which some old postmaster or old pensioned coachman will tell you, over the pipes and grog, after the cricket-club dinner. Silcote stood amazed. He had his suspicions at once—the man lived on suspicion ; but he was a gentleman, in speech at all events.

“I beg your pardon ; I was not aware there was a lady here. I beg your pardon.”

“There is no lady here ; no semblance of one. I am merely an honest and respectable, perfectly honest and respectable, peasant woman. You may see me working in the fields any day, ‘stooping and straddling in the clogging fallows.’ Let me observe that you have shut yourself up from the world too much, or you would never have accused me of being a lady. Ladies, as far as I can judge from my limited experience of them, don’t speak to gentlemen as I spoke to you just now.”

"May I ask you a question, ma'am?" said Silcote, still lost in wonder.

"A dozen, if you choose."

"And get a dozen refusals of answer. Well and good, but will you answer this one out of the imaginary dozen? I will only ask you one, and I ask it. *Who are you?*"

"Exactly what I said before. A peasant's daughter, who worked in the fields, who became dairymaid when her father became cowman; who, in consequence of her great beauty, I believe" (here she drew herself up, and proudly, but frankly and honestly, looked at Silcote with the great brown eyes of hers), "became lady's maid to Lady Caroline Poyntz, now Duchess of Cheshire. Those Poyntz girls would have everything handsome about them. Then there came a paradise of folly: no, not folly; true love and good intentions are not folly. And then I turned peasant again, and then I went back to my old work, and you passed me the other day, scowling like your old self, while I was setting beans. Now, what did you please to want here, Silcote?"

The Squire finding, after a good many years, some one who was not a bit afraid of him, answered civilly and to the purpose.

"The fact is, that this boy of yours behaved very pluckily last night. I want to better him. I will take him into the stable as a helper, and he will rise. It is a provision for him. These Cockney servants I get from Reading never stay. Tom, who will be my heir, has taken a fancy to him; in fact, brought him home last night. He will be stud-groom, and he will be provided for for life. Will you let him come?"

"No. Let him stick to his sheep. I, you see, know more of domestic service than most, and my answer is, 'No.' Let him freeze and bake on the hillside with his sheep. Let him stay up late with his team, and then get out of his warm bed in the biting winter weather to feed them again at four. Let him do hedge and ditch work on food which a Carolina negro would refuse; let him plough the heaviest clay until the public-house becomes a heaven and a rest to him; let him mow until the other mowers find him so weak that he must mow with them no longer, lest he ruin the contract; let him reap until his loud-tongued wife can beat him at *that*—for he must marry, O Lord, for he must marry, and in his own station too; let him go on at the plough tail; among the frozen turnips, among the plashy hedgesides, until the inevitable rheumatism catches him in the back, and the parish employs him on the roads to save the rates; and then, when his wife dies, let them send him to the house, and let him rot there and be buried

in a box: but he shall not be a domestic servant for all that, Silcote. I know too much about that. We have vices enough of our own, without requiring yours."

Silcote had nothing more to say—to her, at least. What he had to say he said to himself as he went home.

"That is a devil of a woman. She is all wrong, but she puts it so well. I never saw such a deuce of a woman in my life."

So two violent ill-regulated souls struck themselves together in consequence of this poaching raid, to the great benefit of both.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH JAMES BEGINS HIS CAREER.

ALGERNON'S children had departed from London. Captain Tom, having had the confessed moiety of his debts paid, was at Dublin with his regiment. Arthur was back at his tutor work; no one was left with the Squire but the golden-haired child Anne.

Once Silcote had a son, some say the best loved of all, who rebelled against him and his hard-strained authority and coarse words, and left his house in high disdain, casting him off with scorn, and rendering the breach between them utterly irreparable by marrying a small tradesman's daughter. He got some small clerkship in Demerara, where he died in a very few years—as men who suddenly wrench up every tie and association are apt to die—of next to nothing. His pretty and good little wife followed him soon, and Anne was left to the mercies of a kind sea captain who had brought them over. The first intimation which Silcote had of his son's death was finding a seafaring man waiting in his hall one day with a bright little girl of about three years old. Silcote heard the story of his son's death in dead silence, accepted the child, and then coolly began to talk on indifferent nautical matters with the astounded mariner. He kept him to lunch, plied him with rare and choice liquor of every kind, and was so flippant and noisy, that the bemuddled sailor quitted the house under the impression that Silcote was the most unfeeling brute he had ever met in his life. It was Silcote's humour that he should think so, and he had his wish.

From this time she was never allowed to leave him. He was

never ostentatiously affectionate to her before other people, but they must have had a thoroughly good understanding in private, this queer couple, for she was not only not a bit afraid of him, but absolutely devoted to him. She was never thwarted or contradicted in any way, and so no wonder she loved him.

Such treatment and such an education would have spoilt most children. Anne was a good deal spoilt, but not more so than was to have been expected. She used to have bad days,—days in which everything went wrong with her ; days which were not many hours old when her maid would make the discovery, and announce it pathetically, that Miss had got out of bed the wrong side. We will resume her acquaintance on one of these days, and see her at her worst.

Silcote hated the servants to speak to him unless he spoke first, and then, like most men who shut themselves from the world, would humiliate himself by allowing them to talk any amount of gossip and scandal with him. Anne's conduct had, however, been so extremely outrageous this morning, that, when Silcote had finished his breakfast, had brooded and eaten his own heart long enough, and ordered Anne to be sent to him to go out walking, the butler gratuitously informed him, without waiting for any encouragement to speak, that " Miss was uncommon naughty this morning, and had bit the Princess."

" What has she been worrying the child about? The child don't bite me. Fetch her here."

Anne soon appeared, dressed for walking, in a radiant and saintlike frame of mind. She was so awfully good and agreeable that any one but that mole Silcote would have seen that she was too good by half. One of the ways by which Silcote tried to worry himself into Bedlam (and he would have succeeded, but for the perfect healthiness of his constitution) was this,—he would take up an imaginary grievance against some one, and exasperate himself about it until he was half mad. Any one who gives himself up to the vice of self-isolation, as Silcote had for so many years, may do the same ; may bring more devils swarming about his ears than ever buzzed and flapped round the cell of a hermit. He did so on this occasion. He got up in his own mind a perfectly imaginary case against the poor long-suffering Princess for ill-using Anne, and went, muttering and scowling, out for his morning's walk, with Anne, wonderfully agreeable and exquisitely good, beside him.

They went into the flower-garden first, and Anne, with sweet innocence, asked if she might pick some flowers. Of course he said Yes ; and, after walking up and down for a quarter of an

hour, the head-gardener came to him, and respectfully gave him warning. When Silcote looked round, he frankly asked the man to withdraw his warning, and told him that he would be answerable it did not occur again. Anne had distinguished herself. In a garden, kept as M'Croskie kept that at Silcote's, you can soon do twenty pounds' worth of damage. Anne had done some thirty. Thunbergias, when clumsily gathered, are apt to come up by the root, and you may pull up a bed before you get a satisfactory bunch. Araucarias, some of them, form very tolerable backs for bouquets, but they were very expensive then. Also, if you pull away hap-hazard at a bed of first-class fuchsias, have a rough-and-tumble fight with a Scotch terrier in a bed of prize calceolarias, and end by a successful raid on the orchis-house, destroying an irreplaceable plant for every blossom you pluck, you will find that thirty pounds won't go very far, and that no conscientious gardener will stay with you. Anne had done all this, and more.

Silcote got the head-gardener to withdraw his resignation; and then, keeping hold of Anne's hand, passed on to the stable-yard without having attempted any remonstrance with her. If she had burnt the house down, it would have been just the same. As he stood at that time he was a perfect fool. Hard hit, years and years ago, in a tender place, he had, as he expressed it, "fled from the world,"—from the world which was spinning all round him. He had brought himself to confess that he had been unjust and hard to this child's father, and he was, in his way, atoning for it by ruining the child by over-indulgence, as he had ruined her father by selfish ill-temper. It is hardly worth talking about. When a man takes to revenging himself on the whole world for the faults of one or two by withdrawing himself into utter selfishness, his folly takes so many forms that it gets unprofitable to examine them in detail. Let us leave Silcote reading his Heine and his Byron, and let him, as much as possible, speak for himself in future. A man's "Iamity"—to use a word taken from Mr. Lewes's witty account of his transcendental friend—is but a dull business. Let us clear the ground by saying that Silcote conceived himself to have suffered an inexpressible wrong, that he had nursed and petted that wrong instead of trying to forget and forgive it, and that he had brooded so long over his original wrong that, on the principle of *crescit indulgens*, he had come to regard everything as a wrong, and very nearly to ruin both his life and his intellect. Well did the peasantry call him the "Dark Squire." The darkness of the man's soul was deep enough at this time, and was to be darker still; but there was a dawn behind the hill, if it would only rise, and in the flush of that dawn stood Arthur and

the peasant woman. Would the dawn rise over the hill, and flush Memnon's temples, till he sang once more? Or would the dark hurtling sand-storms always rise betwixt the statue and the sun, until the statue crumbled away?

Wherever Anne went that morning she was naughtier and naughtier. In the fowl-yard she hunted the largest peacock, and pulled out his tail; and, if she behaved ill in the fowl-yard, she was worse in the stable, and worse again in the kennels. She carefully put in practice all the wickedness she knew—luckily not much, but, according to her small light, that of a Brinvilliers, unrestrained by any law, for her grandfather never interfered with her, and her uncle Arthur was miles away. Children can go on in this way, being very naughty with perfect good temper, for a long time; but, sooner or later, petulance and passion come on, and hold their full sway until the child has stormed itself once more into shame and good behaviour. As one cannon shot, or one thunder growl, will bring down the rain when the storm is overhead, so, when a child has been persistently bad for some time, the smallest accident, or the smallest cross, will bring into sudden activity the subdued hysterical passion, which has, in reality, been the cause of a long system of defiant perversity. Anne's explosion, inevitable, as her shrewd grandfather had seen with some cynical amusement, came in this way.

At the kennel she had asked for a Scotch terrier puppy as a present; and, of course, her grandfather had given it to her. She had teased and bullied it ever since, until at last, when they had gone to the end of a narrow avenue of clipped yews which led to the forest, and had turned homewards, she teased the dog so much that it turned and bit her.

She was on the homeward side of her grandfather, and came running back to him, to put in force the child's universal first method of obtaining justice, that of *telling* the highest available person in authority. "I'll tell mamma," or, "I'll tell your mother, as sure as you are born:" who has not heard those two sentences often enough? The puppy had bit Anne; and she, white with rage, ran back to tell her grandfather.

"He has bit me, grandpa. You must have seen him bite me. The woman saw him, for I saw her looking."

"The woman?" said Silcote, "what woman?" He turned as he spoke, and found himself face to face with the woman—Mrs. Sugden, who had come out of the forest end of the alley, and was standing close to him.

Very beautiful she was, far more beautiful than he had thought when he had seen her first. The features perfect, without fault;

the complexion, though browned with field labour, so exquisitely clear; the pose of the body, and the set of the features, so wonderfully calm and strong. Her great grey eyes were not on him, though he could see them. They seemed to Silcote the cynical to be sending rays of pity and wonder upon the passionate child, as indeed they were. And, while he looked, this common labouring woman, with the cheap cotton gown, turned her large grey eyes on him, Silcote, the great Squire; and in those eyes Silcote saw perfect fearlessness and infinite kindness; but he saw more than the eyes could show him. The eye, as a vehicle to carry one man's soul to another, has been lately very much over-rated. Silcote, as a barrister, knew this very well; the eye to him was a good and believable eye, but what said the eyebrows? Their steady expansion told him of frankness and honesty, forming an ugly contrast to the eyebrows he saw in the glass every morning. What said the mouth? Strength and gentleness. What said the figure? Strength, grace, and wild inexorable purpose in every line of it.

So she was in silence and repose: in speech and action how different! How reckless the attitude, how rude and whirling the words!

"Silcote, you are making a rod for your back in your treatment of that child. She'll live to break your heart for you. Why do you not correct her?—Come here, child; what is the matter?"

The astonished child came and told her.

"You should not have teased him, then. You are naughty, and should be punished. Silcote, will you let me walk and talk with you?"

"Yes, if you won't scold me. You made a fine tirade the last time I spoke to you about the vices of our order. I wonder you are not afraid to walk with me."

"I am neither afraid of you nor of any other man, thank you. I certainly am not afraid of you, because you were originally not a very bad man, and have only come to your present level by your own unutterable selfish conceit. That there is no chance of mending you now I am quite aware: but still I have come to ask you a great favour, a favour which will cost you trouble and money. Mend your ways for this once, and grant my request, and afterwards——"

"Go to the deuce, hey?"

"By no means. I mean something quite different from that. You have not, I believe, done an unselfish thing for twenty years. Five-and-twenty is nearer the mark; you have been eating your

own heart, and reproducing your own nonsense, ever since your first wife's death. Make a change. Do me this favour, and it will become easier to you to do others. In time, if you live long enough, you may be a man again. Come."

He was not a bit surprised at her tone. She had startled him at his first interview with her, but that surprise had worn off. Let a man for twenty years shut himself into a circle of perfectly commonplace incidents and thoughts, the outside edge of that circle will become too solid to be easily broken. New facts, new phenomena, new ideas, may indent that outside edge; but the old round whirls on, and, before the "wheel has come full circle" again, the dent is gone, as in a fused planet some wart of an explosive volcano is merely drawn to the equator, only leaving one of the poles flattened to an unappreciable degree. Mrs. Sugden, like Arthur, had dinged the outside edge of his selfishness. He soon became accustomed to both of them. The globe remained intact; either there must be an internal explosion, or it would spin on for ever.

He answered her without the least hesitation or surprise. She was only a strong-minded woman in cotton, with a deuce of a tongue, and a history; possibly a queer one, though she said it was not. She was a new figure, and to a certain extent odd, but his last recollections of life were in a court of law, and he had seen odder figures there. He was perfectly content that she should walk up and down the garden with him, speaking on terms of perfect equality. Besides, she was clever, and bizarre, and required answering, and after so many years he had got tired of worrying his sister; and it was a new sensation to have a clever woman to face, who would give scorn for scorn, and not succumb with exasperating good nature.

"You say you are come to ask a favour, the granting of which will cost trouble and money. I love money, and hate trouble. You have gone the wrong way to work."

"I am sorry for that, Silcote, because the thing I want done must be done, and you must do it. I really must have it done. Therefore, if you will be kind enough to point out how I have gone wrong, I will follow your directions and begin all over again; only you must do what I require. If you grant that, as you must, I will go to work in any way you choose to dictate."

"I can't go on twisting words about with a woman, who not only commits for herself *ignoratio elenchi* and *petitio principii* in the same breath, but also invents and uses some fifty new fallacies, never dreamt of by Aristotle or Aldrich. What do you want done?"

"You remember a conversation we had the week before last?"

"There she goes. There's your true woman. Violates every law of reason and logic; then when you put her a plain question, asks you whether you remember a conversation you held with her the week before last. No I don't legally remember that conversation. I would perish on the public scaffold sooner than remember a word of it. I ask you what you want me to do, and I want an answer."

"Do you know my boy?"

"No."

"You do."

"Then, as I never contradict a lady, I lie. But I don't all the same."

"You came after him the week before last, and you wanted him for a groom."

"That may be, but I don't know him. I have seen more of the Lord Lieutenant than I have of him; but I don't know the Lord Lieutenant, and I don't want to. He is a Tory, and I never know Tories. How do I know that your boy is not a Tory? Now what do you want of me?"

"I wish you would leave nonsense, Silcote, and come to the point."

"I wish you would leave beating about the bush, and come to the point."

"I will. You do know my boy, Squire, don't you?"

"There she goes again. I knew she would. Who ever could bring a woman to the point? No, I don't know your boy. I have told you so before. I ask you again what do you want with me?"

"We shall never get on like this," said Mrs. Sugden.

"I don't think we shall," said Silcote. "But come, you odd and very queerly-dressed lady, confess yourself beaten, and I will help you out of your muddle."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Sugden.

"Then we have come to a hitch. We had better come into the garden and have some peaches."

She was silent for a moment, and then she took his hand. "Squire," she said, "for the first time in twenty-five years will you be serious,—will you be your old and better self? Instinct partly, and rumour partly, tell me that you were not always the foolish and unhappy man you are now. Help me, Silcote, even though I come asking for help with strange rude words in my mouth. Throw back your memory for forty years, before all this miserable misconception arose; try to be as you were in the old,

old time, when your mother was alive, and that silly babbling princess-sister of yours was but a prattling innocent child—and oh, Silcote, help me, I am sorely bestead!”

She laid her delicate though brown right hand in Silcote's right, as she said this, and he laid his left hand over hers as she spoke, and said, “I'll help you.” And so the past five-and-twenty years were for the moment gone, and there rose a ghost of a Silcote who had been, which was gone in an instant, leaving an echo which sounded like “Too late! Too late!” He held still the hand of this peasant-woman in his, and the echo of his last speech, “I will help you,” had scarcely died out among the overarching cedars.

“I know you will. I knew you would. Listen, then. We have had a long and happy rest here, in the little cottage in the beech forest. You have known nothing of us, but you have been a good landlord, and we thank you. I fear the time has come when we must move forward again, and the world is a wide and weary place, Squire, and I am not so young as I was, and we are very, very poor; but we must be off on the long desolate road once more.”

“Stay near me, and I will protect you.”

“Nay, that cannot be. It is my boy I wish to plead for. I cannot condemn him to follow our fate. I must tear my heart out and part with him. Oh, my God, what shall I do? What shall I do?”

The outbreak of her grief was wild and violent for a time, and the Squire respected it in silence. The child now rambling far away among the flowers for a moment, wondered what her grandfather had said to make the strange woman cry.

“I will not allow him to be a domestic servant; but see, you are a governor of St. Mary's Hospital. Give him, or get him a presentation there, and he is made for life. It is a poor innocent little thing, Squire, but I have educated him well for his age, and he is clever and good. Let me plead for him. What a noble work to rescue one life from such a future as will be his fate if he remains in our rank of life! And a mother's thanks are worth something; come, rouse yourself, and do this.”

“I will do it, certainly,” replied the Squire. “But think twice before you refuse all offers of assistance from me.”

“I cannot think twice; it is impossible.”

“Your boy will be utterly separated from you. Have you thought of that?”

“Yes. I have resolutely inflicted that agony on myself, until use has deadened the pain.”

"Have you reflected that it will be a severe disadvantage to your son for his companions to know that his parents are of such a humble rank in life, and that therefore you should not go and see him there?"

"I have suffered everything except the parting. If I can bear that, I shall live."

"Your son's path and yours separate from this moment. As years go on the divergence will be greater, so that death itself will scarcely make a parting between you. Are you resolute?"

"I am quite resolute. Spare me."

"I will. God help you on your weary road, since you will take no help from man. Good-bye."

Silcote had given his last presentation to St. Mary's to his butler's boy, and he had no presentation to give. His time would not have come for years. But he said nothing about this, and never asked himself whether Mrs. Sugden was aware of the fact or no. Fifty pounds will do a great deal—even buy a couple or four votes; and the next boy presented to the board of governors of St. Mary's was little James Sugden. The iron gates shut on him and the old world was dead; only a dream of freedom and hardship. Instead, was a present reality of a gravelled yard, bounded by pointed windows; of boys who danced round him the first few days, and jeered at him, but among whom he found his place soon; of plenty to eat and of regulated hours. A good, not unkindly place, where one, after a time, learnt to be happy and popular. A great place, with the dim dull roar of the greatest city in the world always around it; bounded by the tall iron gates, outside which one had once seen a tall grey figure standing and watching. There was a new world of emulation and ambition inside those gates, but there was an old world outside which would not let itself be forgotten for months. So that at times James awakened in his bed in the dark midnight, and cried for his mother; but time goes fast with children, and the other boys pelted boots and hard things at him, and laughed at him, which was worse. In six months the mother was only a dim old dream, dear enough still, but very old, getting nearly forgotten. Would you have it otherwise? I would, but the wise ones say No.

And at home! How fared the poor patient mother in this case? Oh, you children, you children, have you any idea of your own unutterable selfishness; and, to make you more utterly selfish, they give you cakes and bright half-crowns, which you eat and spend while the poor mother at home lies sleepless. One of the most beautiful touches in that most beautiful book, "Tom

Brown" (a book which only yesterday was as fresh and as good as ever), is the infinite grief of Tom when he finds that his letter has not been sent, and that his mother must have thought him faithless to his last solemn promise for three days. Little bitter griefs like this, or Maggie Tulliver starving her brother's rabbits, or Mr. Van Brunt falling down the ladder and breaking his leg, seem, it is pleasant to reflect, to affect the public quite as much as the fiercest tragedies. But Tom Brown was no ordinary boy, any more than Maggie Tulliver was an ordinary girl. Children, for the most part, *are* selfish. James Sugden was no ordinary boy, either; but in the new hurly-burly into which he found himself thrust, where every boy's hand was good-naturedly against him, his mother's image was gone from his mind but very few months after her body had passed away from the gate. Only in the watches of the night this dearly loved one came back to him, and proved that, though she might be forgotten in the day-time, with all its riot and ambition, yet she was as dearly loved in his inmost heart as ever.

James Sugden the elder sat, in the evening, at the door of his cottage, sadly, with his face buried in his hands. It was a solemn September evening; the days were drawing in, and the chilly air, and the few first golden boughs told of the long winter which was coming. The Oxfordshire wolds were getting dim, and the western reaches in the river were getting crimson, when along the valley below a little column of steam fled swiftly, and a little train slid across a bridge, and into a wood, and was gone. Then he arose, and, having made some preparations, went out and watched again.

Not for long. Far across the broad darkening fields his keen sight made out a figure advancing steadily towards him. The footpath crossed the broad fields at different angles, and sometimes the figure was lost behind hedges or outstanding pieces of woodland; but he was sure of its identity, and sure that it was solitary. It was lost to his sight when it entered the denser forest which fringed the base of the hill; but he knew which way it would come, and advanced across the open glade to meet it. He was at the stile when Mrs. Sugden came out from the wood, tired, pale, and dusty, with her walk from Twyford, and she put her arm round his neck, and kissed his cheek.

They fenced a little at first. James said, "I thought you would come by that train. I saw it go by, and watched for you."

"It is a nice train. It's express, you know; but the country gentlemen have made them drop a carriage at Twyford; but there

is no third class, and that makes eighteenpence difference, and the money is running so very short. And so you saw the branch train run along, did you? I wouldn't come to Shiplake; the walk is nearly as great, and there's the getting across the river."

And so they fenced, as they were walking together towards their cottage. On this occasion James showed the greater valour, by introducing first the subject nearest to both their hearts. He said, "You must tell me about it."

And she said, "It is all over."

He said, "Not quite, sister. I want to know how he went off. Come. Only one more tooth out, sister. Let me know how the boy went off. Now or never, while the wound is raw and fresh; and then leave the matter alone for ever."

"If you will have it, Jim, he went off very well. Cried a deal; quite as much as you'd expect any boy to cry who believed that he was going to see his mother again in a fortnight. I told him so, God help me! Sent his love to you; is that any odds? Now it's all over, and I wish to have done with it. You've been a kind and loving brother to me, as James, God knows, and I have been but a poor sister to you. I have worried you from pillar to post, from one home to another, until I thought we had found one here. And now I have to say to my dear, stupid old brother, 'We must walk once more.' Oh, James, my dear brother! if I could only see you settled with a good wife, now; you have been so faithful and so true, you have given up so much for me."

A very few days afterwards, the steward was standing at his door, in the early dawn, when the Sugdens came towards him, and left the key of their cottage, paying up some trifle of rent. They were expedited for travelling, he noticed, and had large bundles. Their furniture, they told him, had been fetched away by the village broker, and the fixtures would be found all right. In answer to a wondering inquiry as to where they were going, James merely pointed eastward, and very soon after they entered the morning fog, bending under their bundles, and were lost to sight.

CHAPTER XII.

ARTHUR SILCOTE MAKES THE VERY DREADFUL AND ONLY FIASCO
OF HIS LIFE.

For two years there was no change worthy of mention, save that the muddle and untidiness in Lancaster Square grew worse instead of better, and Algernon's health suffered under the hopeless worry, which ever grew more hopeless as time went on.

Dora had grown into a fine creature, pretty at present with the universal prettiness of youth, but threatening to grow too large for any great beauty soon. Reggy had, likewise, grown to be a handsome, but delicate-looking, youth : with regard to the others we need not particularize. The pupils had been succeeded by two fresh ones, one of whom, a bright lad of sixteen, by name Dempster, was staying over the Christmas vacation—his father having returned to India—and supposed himself to be desperately in love with Dora, who received his advances with extreme scorn.

Old Betts was there still, not changed, in the least, to the outward eye. He used to go to the city every day, look into the shops, and come home again ; at least, that was all he ever seemed to do : but it turned out afterwards that sometimes some of his old friends would, half in pity, half in contempt, throw into his way some little crumbs in the way of commission. Betts had carefully hoarded these sums and kept his secret from Algernon, nursing it with great private delight until that morning ; but Algernon's worn look had drawn it from him prematurely. He had been accumulating it for years, he told Algy, and there it was. He had meant to have kept it until it was a hundred pounds, and have given it to Algernon on his birthday. But it had come on him that morning that it lay with him to make the difference between a sad Christmas and a merry one ; and who was he to interpose a private whim between them and a day's happiness ? So there it was, ninety-four pounds odd ; and it was full time to start across for church, and the least said, the soonest mended. Algernon had said but little, for he was greatly moved, and he preached his kindly, earnest Christmas sermon with a cleared brow and a joyful voice which reflected themselves upon the faces of many of his hearers, and gladdened them also.

Algernon had been vexed and bothered for some time about his Christmas bills. This contribution of Mr. Betts towards the housekeeping relieved him from all anxiety, and made a lightness

in his heart which had not been there for years. Firstly, because he found himself beforehand with the world ; and secondly, because it showed him Betts in a new light. Mr. Betts had been vulgar, ostentatious, and not over-honest in old times—had been cringing and somewhat tiresome in the later ones. But he had distinctly and decidedly done a kind action in a graceful and gentlemanly way. Anything good delighted Algy's soul ; and here was something good. He and Betts were an ill-assorted couple, brought together by the ties of chivalrous kindheartedness on the one hand, and of sheer necessity on the other ; and this action of Mr. Betts drew them closer together than they had ever been before. It reacted on Betts himself with the best effects. It removed that wearing sense of continual humiliating obligation, which too often, I fear, makes a man hate his kindest friend ; and caused him to hold his head higher than he had held it for a long time. As he told Algernon over their modest bottle of sherry after dinner, when the children had gone to the Regent's Park to see the skaters, he felt more like a man than he had ever felt since his misfortune. When Algy said, in reply, that he thanked God that his misfortune had been so blessed to him, he did not speak mere pulpit talk, but honestly meant what he said. If you had driven him into a corner, he, I think, with his inexorable honesty, would have confessed that what he meant was, that Betts, although he still dropped his h's and ate with his knife, was becoming more of a gentleman—consequently more of a Christian—consequently nearer to the standard of Balliol or University. Algy's Christianity was so mixed with his intense Oxfordism, that to shock the latter was, I almost fancy, for a moment to weaken the former. Who can wonder at it ? Three years of perfect happiness had been passed there. Alma Mater had been (forgive the confusion of metaphor) an Old Man of the Mountain to him, and had admitted him into Paradise for three years. He was bound to be a mild and gentle Assassin for her for the rest of his life.

We must leave him, in the beams of the first sunshine which had fallen on him for some years, to follow the very disorderly troop that posted off, with their early Christmas dinner in their mouths, to see the skaters in the Regent's Park. They were a very handsome, noisy, and disorderly group, and the inexorable laws of fiction compel me to follow them, and use them as a foil ; because their leader, Miss Lee, was louder, more disorderly, and a hundred times more beautiful than the whole lot of them together.

If she had been less thoroughly genial and good-humoured it would have been (for some reasons) much better. If she had been

less demonstrative in the streets it would have been much better. If she had been less noisy and boisterous it would have been a great deal better still. If she had not been so amazingly beautiful, one could have excused all her other shortcomings. But here she was, and one must make the best of her: beautiful, attractive, boisterous, noisy; ready at any moment to enter into an animated and friendly discussion with a policeman, or for that matter a chimney-sweep: with a great tendency to laugh loudly at the smallest ghost of a joke, and perfectly indifferent as to whether she stood on the pavement, in the gutter, or in the middle of the road. There she was, in short, her real self; as she was at that time. A mass of kindness, vitality, and good humour; half spoilt by her imperfect training, and further spoilt by the respectful indulgence she had been used to in Algernon's house; but as clever as need be.

"I can't think why it is," said Algernon once, in answer to a remonstrance of Arthur's about this young lady (little *he* knew what was in store for *him*). "She was not boisterous when she first came to me. There was not a quieter girl anywhere. She can't have learnt to be noisy from *me*. I am sure I ain't a noisy man."

But Miss Lee had had the bit between her teeth so long that at all events *she* was very noisy. And she had another *specialité* which I think is common to all young ladies of excessive vitality and good humour, who are not accustomed to control of any kind. If she saw any one of either sex doing anything, she must straightway, on the spot, do that thing herself. On their first starting, for instance, Dempster, the pupil, illegally, and in defiance of Her Majesty's peace, throne, and government, &c., &c., went down a slide. Miss Lee promptly essayed to do the like, regardless of time or place. Now the three or four winters which Miss Lee had passed in London had been mild, and sliding is not an art practised in Devonshire; Miss Lee had never tried sliding before, and so came down on the back of her head in the street, and began to think that she was enjoying herself.

With her kindly, uncontrollable vivacity, in the brisk winter air she became more "berserk" as she went on. She was only twenty or so, and life was a very glorious and precious possession to her. An honest, innocent, childish creature, who had only lately found out that she was a child no longer, and wanted a lover whom she could tease and make run about for her. She knew how to treat lovers from an infinite number of novels; only she had not got one yet. She wanted one sadly; what woman does not? She was not utterly unconscious of her wonderful beauty, and she was thinking, on this very afternoon, whether Dempster, the pupil,

was not old enough to be made a fetch-and-carry lover of : and she came to the conclusion that he was not old enough to stand it, and that she might still find a rival in raspberry tarts. This day, for the last time in her life, she was nothing more than a wild school-girl. Remember that she had no mother, no cultivation, and for three or four years no control whatever. If she was an unworthy person, she would not be mentioned here.

It is not necessary to follow Miss Lee and her charge through their long afternoon's walk. It might be funny ; but we don't want to be funny. Enough to say that, what with good health, good humour, youth, and a natural enough carelessness of appearance, she committed a hundred small indiscretions, and arrived home by much the most boisterous of the party. And, after a short scrambling and riotous tea, they all took to blind-man's-buff as a sedative.

When every one had got more tangled and excited than ever ; when Algernon was laughing fit to split his sides ; when Mr. Betts, intensely interested and enthusiastic, had, as blind man, walked bang into the fire and burnt himself, under the belief, Dora wickedly suggested, that Miss Lee was up the chimney ; then Miss Lee herself proposed that they—with a view to rest and quiet themselves before supper and snap-dragon—should have a game of hide-and-seek all over the house. It was voted by acclamation ; and, during the acclamations, one of the junior Silcotes who are practically out of this story, fell down stairs, with such a thumping of his soft body on the stair carpet, such a rattling of the nearly equally soft head of him against the banisters, and such a clatter of loose stair rods which he brought after him in the catastrophe, that they were all quiet for nearly five seconds, until his frantic father had dashed down, and found him lying in the hall unhurt, under the impression that he had distinguished himself, and done the thing of the evening ! Then they began their hide-and-seek.

Mr. Betts hid first ; but Dora contemptuously walked up to him, and took him from behind the scullery door. Then Reginald hid, and with amazing dexterity got *home* into the front parlour through the folding doors which connected that room with his father's study, which was the back parlour on the first floor (perpend it for yourselves in a twelve-roomed house ; you will find it come right, for I saw it. I might describe the spreading of bread and butter, or the baking of cakes, but I must not dwell on a game of hide-and-seek). After this, Dora had hid, but Dempster the pupil had found her, and the rest of them found that Dora had lost her temper. A rude boy, I fear, that Dempster, though neither of

them said anything about it afterwards. Perhaps an ill-achieved kiss may be worth a sound box on the ears, and a week's sulks. That is a matter in which only the first parties are concerned. Then when confusion and fun were grown into mad hurly-burly, it became Miss Lee's turn to hide.

At this time, also, it became Arthur Silcote's turn—after having preached for, and also dined with, a Balliol man in the neighbourhood—to step across to his brother to see how he was getting on, to knock at the door, to be admitted instantly by a grinning maid-servant, and, on inquiring about the noise in the house, to be told, by that confused and delighted young person, that they were playing at blind-man's-buff, and that his niece, Miss Dora, was at that moment hiding behind the study curtains.

I dread going on. I am afraid of telling the awful catastrophe which followed. It is very dreadful, but there is not a bit of harm in it, and it might happen to any one to-morrow. Arthur knew the way perfectly well; and he, the preux chevalier of Balliol, the man who was considered a perfect prig about women among men quite as particular as he, then and there, believing that it was his little niece Dora, lugged out Miss Lee from behind the curtain, kissed her, called her his dear little pussy, and then, putting his two hands behind her waist, jumped her towards the door, just as Dora and the whole party came in with a candle, Dora saying, "Don't tell me; I *know* she is here." She was indeed. And so was her uncle.

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO MORE GUESTS.

THE most awful part of the accident remained a profound secret. All that the astonished Dora and the rest of the children saw, was that Miss Lee and her uncle were alone together in the dark, and that they were both the colour of that rose which she knew at Silcotes as "General Jacqueminot." Dora said little, but thought the more: all she said was, "Why, you are all in the dark here. Uncle, how did you get in?" After which they all went up stairs, the younger ones shouting all together to their father and grandfather, how they had found Miss Lee and Uncle Archy, alone in the dark in the study. Miss Lee was not present, and Algernon rallied his brother right pleasantly. Archy replied that it was an accident,

but so very awkwardly that Algernon, little conscious of the magnitude of the disaster, thought how very shy about women university life was apt to make men otherwise perfectly self-possessed.

When Miss Lee reappeared at the supper-table leading in the two youngest children, the blushes had blazed out of her beautiful cheeks. She was nicely dressed in a well-cut quiet dress; not that it was of much consequence to such radiant beauty as hers (as Dr. Holmes so prettily says, anything almost will do to cover young and graceful curves). The hair was banded up, and nothing was left of the late disorder. In the expression of her face, her attitudes, and her air, she combined the dignified humility of the governess with the melancholy pride of the gentlewoman of fallen fortunes; the modesty of extreme youth with the consciousness of a beauty which in her humble circumstances was a vexatious annoyance to her, and with which she would gladly have dispensed. Nothing was ever better done. The worst of it was that it was thrown away on every one except Dora, whose eyes grew wider with wonder, while she looked and remembered the indiscretions of the morning walk. "You would not come in at the beginning of the second lesson, if *he* was reading prayers, my lady," said the shrewd young person to herself.

But all this exquisite moral "get up" was lost on Arthur for a time. He did not even notice the curtsey and look with which she greeted him: an inclination made with dropped eyelids, which expressed humility, dignity, and a forgiving sense of injury received (for she knew well enough that he had complained of her being noisy: secrets are not long kept in a house so untidy as that of Algernon's). He never looked at her. He had not seen her for some time, and had never observed her closely, being very shy of looking at women. He now regarded her as an objectionable and fast-going person, in whose power he had put himself utterly; whom by a horrible combination of evil stars and evil influences, he had kissed in the dark, called his pussy, and jumped up and down. If she would only have complained to Algy, he could have apologised and explained; but she wouldn't. As a gentleman he had to keep the dreadful secret, and he almost hated her.

I should be inclined to say that it was very difficult to hate anything really beautiful and good very long, if the aforementioned good and beautiful thing gives you anything like an opportunity of appreciating and admiring it. Miss Lee gave Arthur every opportunity of admiring and appreciating her, though Arthur upset her arrangements by not looking at her. Dora looked at her, however, even before supper, and looked at her so long, and with such

an expression of wonder in her face, that Mr. Betts asked her what she was gazing at. She replied, "At Miss Lee," and Miss Lee heard her.

"Why are you looking at Miss Lee so strong?"

"I was wondering whether she had been hurt on the slide this morning," answered Dora.

"If I had been, Dora," answered Miss Lee, "I should have gone to *bed*."

There was such an awkward emphasis on the word *bed* that Dora felt that she was not quite Miss Lee's match yet, and had better hold her tongue. For there was no appeal against Miss Lee in that house; and Miss Lee, in her position as governess, could send anybody to bed in five minutes. Dora, although in opposition to her governess, as a true British young lady is bound to be, had sense enough to hold her tongue and let things drive. "So you are going to set your cap at Uncle Arthur, are you, my lady?" she said to herself. "Good gracious, goodness me, how fine we are getting all of a sudden! Yes, indeed! Oh, quite so! Bed may be bed, my lady, but I have seen the last of French irregular verbs for some time, I fancy; unless I am a born fool, which I ain't; no, nor I won't be kept in over my colloquial French either, after this; and she trampolineing away to Hampstead with the children, and Dempster, and riding donkeys, because I said, '*Il va pluvioir*.'"

Dora was rebellious against Miss Lee, although they were the best friends in the world.

They had just sat down to supper when a new guest arrived.

A gallant-looking youth, with good features and fine bold intelligent eyes, dressed in a quiet but very becoming uniform. He stood behind Algernon's chair, waiting for recognition; and Dora saw him first, and called attention to him.

"My boy," said Algernon, turning kindly on him, "I had given you up. How late you are. You have lost all the fun, and we have had such a merry day. Come and sit by me. What made you so late?"

"We had anthem in chapel this afternoon,—Purcell's. And the third master, Hicks, asked me, as a favour, to stay and help; and we always do anything for him. So I came by the six o'clock train."

"Well, here you are at last; make yourself as happy as you may. Sit beside me. Reginald, this is the new schoolfellow I told you of. He has promised to be your protector. Come and make friends with him."

Reginald looked for one moment at Dora, but Dora was ready

for his telegraph, and left looking at the new comer, and nodded twice or thrice shortly and rapidly at Reginald. The nod said emphatically, "He'll do;" and Reginald went and sat beside him. Dora, the open-eyed, watched them. At first Reginald was a little shy, but soon, as far as she could see—for she could not hear—the stronger, older, and handsomer boy won him over by kindness of talk. Dora looked until Reginald took out his brand new knife, and showed it to the strange boy. Then she said, "*That's all right.* Now let's see how you two other little people are getting on." The two people, whom she called "the two other little people," were not getting on at all. Her uncle and Miss Lee were at opposite sides of the table, and were not looking at one another. "If he were her director, I wonder if she would confess about the slide," thought Dora.

But Dora found that youth, good humour, and innocence were very pleasant things to contemplate, and so she looked at the two boys again, and her honest heart was satisfied. They had got their heads together now, and Reginald had got his peg-top and his string and his dibbs and agate taws, out all round his plate of plum-pudding, and was showing them to the big boy in the uniform, who seemed to possess none of these treasures.

"He is poorer than Reggy," she said, "and how gentle and pleasant he looks! I like that boy."

And indeed he looked very likeable indeed, in his quiet manly dress, and his whole face beaming with kindness and pleasure.

There was some pleasant discussion about one of the large agate marbles, and the two boys appealed to Algernon, who sat radiant beside them. Reginald stretched across the strange lad, and pushed him against his father, so that his curly head was almost against Algernon's face. At the same moment a great brown hand was twisted gently into the lad's curls, and his head was pulled back until the owner of the hand could look down into the boy's face. At which time a loud, pleasant voice said,—

"Out of the way curly-wig, and let us have a chance at your father. Algy, old cock, how are you?"

There was a general rising and confusion. All sorts of notes composed the harmony which followed; but from Mr. Betts' contented growl of "The Captain, by jingo!" down to the shriek of the smallest child from Miss Lee's kind arms, "Uncle Tom, what have you brought us?" the notes, discordant in sound, were the same in sentiment. They meant enthusiastic welcome to the ne'er-do-well and ne'er-to-do-better, Captain Tom Silcote of Silcotes.

Algy was very much affected and touched. He never cried,

even in his most pathetic sermon; but he had to stop sometimes, and he stopped now. When he had done stopping he said,—

“My dearest Tom! This is kind.”

“I don’t see it. Archy, boy, he says it’s kind of me to come and get such a welcome as this. How are you, Betts? Miss Lee, my good creature, you look—all right, Algy—Miss Lee, you look, you look—I don’t know what the deuce you don’t look like. There—there’s no harm in that. Out of the way, you handsome young monkey, and let me get near your father.”

“That is not my boy, Tom: that is a friend of Reginald’s.”

“Then go, friend of Reginald’s, slope, and make love to Dora, if the young pepper-box will let you. Any way, give me this chair. The room smells of turkey: have it fetched back, I am as hungry as a hunter. Betts, is there a good glass of sherry in the house? Hold your tongue, Algy—what do you know about good sherry? See how wise old Betts looks all of a sudden. Six fingers is sixty! Nonsense, man; is your Aunt Jane dead? A Christmas treat? All right! let’s have a glass, then. Betts, old fellow, I want to talk to you on business. Archy, how are you and the other prigs getting on at Oxford?”

Arthur was not in good humour with his brother. As fellow and tutor of Balliol, he had to do with fast men at that college, such as there were. As a pro-proctor, who was taking a somewhat peculiar line in the university, he had to do with fast men of other colleges—very fast men, men who could not be tolerated at Balliol for half a term. But his brother Tom was faster than any of them. Arthur had to do with many cases of fast lads. The last was that of a servitor at Christ Church, who had been hunting in pink, and owed 500*l.* (a real case). Arthur had seen to this lad’s affairs, and had compounded with his creditors for about eighteen years’ penal servitude. I mean that he was to deny himself every luxury and pleasure for some eighteen years, to pay off the debts, with the interest on them, which he had contracted in one year among wine-merchants, livery-stable keepers, and grooms. When will lads give over believing that hunting at five pounds a day is the summit of human happiness? When are the dons going to forbid fox-hunting?

But this servitor lad was penitent, and promised amendment. Tom was nothing of the kind. Arthur had been the agent between his father and his eldest brother in the last settlement of Tom’s everlasting debts. He had taken to the Squire a

schedule of Tom's debts, which he knew, by his dawning knowledge of the world, to be only a half statement; but he had taken it, and asked for payment.

The sum was so fearful—eight thousand pounds—that he, brave as he was, knowing that sum was not all the reality, was frightened when he presented it. He did not recover his nerve until the Squire, in his cursing, cursed *him* as an accomplice. Then anger gave him nerve, and he resumed that old ascendancy over his father which his perfect rectitude had in the first instance given him: feeling at the same time like a villain, because he was sure, in his innermost heart, that the schedule of Tom's debts was understated. The moment when Silcote the elder recovered from his furious indignation sufficiently to tell Arthur that he could trust *him* at all events, was probably the most bitter and the most degraded of his life.

The C. C. servitor had told the truth, and had been penitent; not that the penitence of that sort of young gentleman is of much use, unless they are steadily whipped in by a stronger hand and will. His brother Tom, as he knew perfectly, whenever he *chose* to know, had not told the truth, and there was not one half-penny worth of penitence about him. So Arthur was in contemptuous variance with his brother. Tom's persistent wrong-doing and waste of life were to his mind inexplicable and hateful; and, moreover, Tom had outstepped an arbitrary line which the world lays down, and the world was beginning to talk. How long he might stay in his present regiment was very doubtful.

And so not caring to look much at his brother, he looked another way; and the other way happened to be Miss Lee's way; and, as she had her eyes turned away, he had courage to look at her; and, when he had begun looking at her, he found he could not leave off; she was beyond all he had ever dreamed of. This was the creature he had complained of as being boisterous, and had—heavens! that wouldn't do to think about. She was sitting quite alone, and no one was speaking to her; every one was busy round his brother. What could a gentleman do but go across and speak to a lady under such circumstances? Was she unconscious of his approach? If so, why was her heart drumming away such a triumphant tune? But, at all events, her air was one of extreme unconsciousness, when, with a sudden start as he spoke, she turned her wondering, lovely face on his.

CHAPTER XIV.

ST. MARY'S BY THE CITY.

ST. MARY'S Hospital was founded much about the same time as Christ's Hospital, was nearly as rich as that very noble institution, and in some respects closely resembled it. Like Christ's Hospital, it was hemmed in to the great city and the boys wore a miserable and ridiculous dress. Here the resemblance between that noble institution and St. Mary's ceased altogether. St. Mary's had copied its faults, but none of its excellences; at all events, results seemed to prove so. Christ's Hospital has, I think, 600 boys; St. Mary's, with nearly the same wealth, has 190 odd. Christ's Hospital has turned out, and turns out every year, some very noble men. St. Mary's never turned out anything, not even—forgive the pun—a good many boys who had much better have been turned out.

Some little mistake in the founder's will had begun the ruin of this place. Lands had been left in Essex, Northumberland, and Cornwall for its maintenance, from which the master was to receive 50*l.* a year, and eight fellows 20*l.* a year each, that they might educate in the fear of God, grammar, plainsong, and the use of organs, and also maintain, free of cost, any boys that might be recommended to them by any future benefactors of the hospital. But, out of the surplus funds of the hospital, twelve boys were annually to be apprenticed to trades, or, if they seemed to have gifts, to be sent to the universities of Oxford or Cambridge. Moreover, each year, the two best scholars were to be sent, the one to St. Paul's, Oxford, the other to St. Dominic's at Cambridge; at which colleges funds had been provided for their maintenance.

A foolish, rambling, kindly bequest. Let us see very shortly how it was acted on.

The first thing to notice is, that the institution became richer year by year, until its wealth was gigantic. As years rolled on, the wild bleak hungry farms in Cornwall, where rent had been so difficult to collect, came to turn out their tons upon tons of tin, and the Northumberland estates vomited up their tons of coal in rivalry. The Lincolnshire estates now almost equalled in wealth the two others put together. The spire of Fenton Magna, one of the livings which came into their gift at the Reformation, which once gathered tithe from a little easterly knot of poor farms, and dominated a great saltwater-ruined tract,

spreading easterly to the sea ; now looked on broad rich fen lands as far as the eye could reach, and gathered its tithe from 8,000 acres of the richest and best farmed land in the world, instead of from 800 of the poorest and worst farmed. They were as rich as Christ Church, and had eight good livings in their gift. Let us see how they used their wealth.

They were bound to receive, and to maintain, any boy nominated by any future benefactor of the hospital. This was an awkward clause, because any one might have claimed to maintain a boy for a guinea. Illegally, but perhaps reasonably, they instituted an order of governors ; any man giving them a hundred pounds down was to be a life governor ; if they had been less wealthy, one could have excused them for this precaution. With regard to the twelve boys to be apprenticed or sent to the university, they read that clause liberally, and apprenticed the whole lot of them. With regard to the two scholars that were to be sent to St. Paul's and St. Dominic's, why, they carried out their founder's will, and sent them there ; and the funds left for their provision had increased in much the same proportion as their own, so that these young gentlemen had as little to complain of as the master and fellows of St. Mary's. The rest of the money they put into their own pockets, without fear of royal commissioners.

Who came, however. Granby Dixon was the man who did the business ostensibly, but Arthur Silcote, Granby Dixon's old Balliol friend, was the real mover in the matter, and when he moved he did so with a will. The thing was commissioned, looked into, and abolished. It was worse than Dulwich. The commissioners had no difficulty whatever, the matter was too shameful ; they, having arranged the financial matters, made their *congé* to the master, fellows, and governors, saying at the same time, through their chairman, that they left the rest to the governors ; whose authority had been so long respected, now that it could not be resisted.

Our little friend, James, had been nearly a year at the school, and was beginning to get used to it, if not to like it. This place was warm, there was always enough to eat here, and the people were kind. No putting on of hard boots on frozen feet here. No dinners of dry crusts, no battling with hail, snow, or long dull driving south-westerly rain. In this place kind and strong hands had conquered Nature so that the young and the feeble might rest from the lower strife to prepare themselves for the higher one. Still, Nature had not always been unkind to him ; she had sometimes her tender gentle moods. There had been long cloudless

days, with the blue unstained, from sunrise to sunset; there had been deep hazel copses of green and gold; and long shallows over silver gravel where one lay and rolled, seeing the spotted fish send by under the quivering water: as well as there had been wild days when one had to drag one's weary limbs over clay fallows. These better moods of Nature he missed in his brick prison. He had now been there eight months, spending holidays and all there, and his ear wearied at the roar of the surrounding city, which had never ceased, night or day, all that weary time.

He had leave on certain saints' days to wander in that city, and he had made one or two efforts to pierce the surrounding network of brick and mortar, and get to the country once more. In the hot solitude of his Midsummer vacation he had planned and tried to execute the greatest of these expeditions. Sleeping on his cherished purpose, he awoke full of eagerness to carry it out, and started southward as soon as the gates were opened, on a bright summer's morning. His object was to reach a certain "Peerless Pool," which existed, and still I think exists, behind Lambeth, of which a boy, a friend of his, had told him; to bathe there, and return. He had plenty of money—threepence—and the distance could scarcely be more than four miles. The thing promised well, but it ended in complete disappointment. The boys in the immediate neighbourhood had got used to the absurd and hideous green baize petticoats in which the St. Mary's boys were clothed, and knew that to bully a solitary one was to have the whole swarm about your ears; but as he got further afield his clothes attracted still more attention, until at last advance became impossible. They would have no boys in green baize petticoats there. He was a boy who would fight, as we have seen before, but you can't fight an enemy numbering hundreds, in detail, one down another on. He lost nerve and ran at last, and was as a matter of course pursued; he managed at last to lose his pursuers, and himself also, in a maze of little streets: and by eleven o'clock he was back at the school, panting and wearied, with the hot tears of grief and indignation ready to break out when the time should come.

Tears did not come at first; anger and pride kept his eyes dry for a time; but a turn or two in solitude through the desolate whitewashed corridors, and the more desolate dormitories, threw the self which had asserted and forgotten itself in the cruelty and turmoil of the streets back upon self once more. And self sent back to self means utter isolation and hopeless misery. In children it produces a wild hysterical passion of tears, which rends the body until it deadens the sense of desolation in the mind: with

grown men who cannot weep it is less merciful. Are there not suicides and madmen?

James, poor lad, after having failed utterly and miserably in his long cherished expedition—after having, in spite of his valour, been pummelled, beaten, and forced to fly to the only home he knew now—made more miserable by the sight of those empty corridors and dormitories, went out into the wide hot main quadrangle, and did what nature told him to do: cried himself to sleep against the pump. The pump was close to the board-room window, and there was a board to-day; but it was as good a place as another.

He fell asleep, and he had a dream, very much like other dreams: that is to say, a perfect farrago of nonsense. Every one he had ever known in his life—and a few more, such as Robinson Crusoe, the Sleeping Girl of Trumpington, the late Mrs. Shipton, Governor Picton, Richard the Third, and Julia Mannering, whom he had only known from books—were all assembled at Silcotes, none of them either doing or saying in the least what they ought, or what they wanted. The only point in common which they had, from Robinson Crusoe to the steward's-room boy, was that they were all waiting for Dark Squire Silcote. He put in an appearance at last, but in that unsatisfactory way common to dreams. He never really appeared: he only spoke, in an awful voice, at the sound of which every one bolted, and the boy awoke. What the Dark Squire said was, "Sir Hugh Brockliss is a fool, an ass, and a prig. If you set to work breeding fools, you must succeed sooner or later. The Brocklisses have been fools since the Conquest, and they married his father to Lady Emily Llywellyn, and the Llywellyns have been fools since the Fall. Lady Eve Llywellyn was the woman who did the original mischief with the serpent. I have seen their pedigree at Glyn Dwr. The man can't help being an ass, but I never was beaten by horse or donkey yet. You had best look for that boy, Archy; it is a kind thing to do. Mr. Betts, we will not be beaten by these idiots. Now, if you will fulfil your promise and guide me to Lombard Street, I shall be obliged."

A dream and no dream. The boy had been hearing in his dog's-sleep the voice of Silcote, growling away in the committee-room for above half an hour, and his dream had fashioned itself accordingly. He awoke to see Silcote, whose figure he knew well, walking away across the hot empty quadrangle, with a seedy, fat-looking old gentleman—to see Sir Hugh Brockliss, whom he also knew well by sight as a governor, standing in the board-room doorway and scowling after him; and to find Arthur Silcote bending over him, smiling.

"You little pea in a drum," he said, "I was coming to look for you. You and I are going out for a grand holiday together. Boy, you have been crying! Have they been ill-using you? Tell me the truth, without fear, now."

James told the truth. Every one about the hospital was most kind to him. But he told the story of his projected expedition, and its failure in consequence of his clothes.

Arthur set his teeth and stamped his foot. "We are going to change all that, boy," he said, "if the idiots will let us. And Sir Hugh Brockliss talks about the associations of the place. Come on, my child. Wash your face, and let you and me go down among the ships. We will mend all this for you, boy, and mend it soon, I hope. Leave that alone, and come with me."

In half an hour Arthur Silcote had his boy down among the ships at the East India Docks. And, if you ever have a boy thrown on your hands, and if that boy finds himself bored by being taken down the river and shown the ships, why, don't undertake that boy again, for he is not worth the trouble.

James, after his morning's failure, passed after all the golden day of his life. Arthur began by pitying the poor little pea in the drum, and gave him a treat as a matter of duty. As a general rule, a man when he goes down the river does not choose a boy in green baize petticoats for his companion. Arthur took the boy as a mere matter of duty and kindness; but, before they had got far on their voyage, he found that *he* was not doomed by any means to pass the most unpleasant day in his life. The boy was such a queer boy. He was so strangely well read, and yet so unutterably ignorant about the visible outside of things. The boy's general floating information was *absurdly* great. When he found himself fairly under Arthur's protection, and, having forgotten about his ridiculous dress, got confidential, he puzzled Arthur in fifty ways.

There were meetings of the board of governors twice a week now, and the attendance at them grew more numerous, and the debates more animated. He soon began to understand the matter.

Arthur Silcote had taken it into his head that the school should be moved into the country, and that their hideous dress should be replaced by a neat uniform and lighter shoes in which they could play. The whole thing was no business of his; he was in no way connected with the school; but he wished it done, and, consequently, intended to do it, and, consequently, did it. Granby Dixon was no good here; further reforms were left to the governors, of whom he knew only two—his father Silcote, and old Betts, his brother's father-in-law—a very poor team to start with for accom-

plishing such a great revolution. Yet they were two very good trumps. Betts had become a governor in the time of his prosperity, and was a governor still, and would fight loyally to the death for anything bearing the name of Silcote. He was safe, and moreover was as able a vestry debater as could easily be found. Then his father. How to arouse his persistent bull-dog obstinacy and ill-temper in the cause, was for a few days a question. He had sufficient influence over his father to make him *move* in the matter; but it required something more than his influence to arouse him from so many years of laziness and selfishness, and make him persist. An old feud, about a worthless piece of covert, was the weapon he found in his hand after a few days' consideration. Sir Hugh Brockliss had crossed his father and gone to law with him on this piece of copse. If there was a man more than another whom his father hated, it was Sir Hugh Brockliss. Sir Hugh was a Tory, another great point; and Sir Hugh had declared for keeping the school where it was, and the dress as it was, on the grounds of the associations of the place. Arthur had only to go down to Silcotes, and point out these facts to his father, when his father arose in a white heat of rage, and committed himself to the question of moving the school and altering the dress, as long as breath was in his body. He cared nothing about it. But anger and personal spleen made him undertake a purpose, and stick to it with the utmost tenacity until it was carried; while principle never would have moved him.

Arthur knew perfectly well that, by holding the red rag of Sir Hugh Brockliss before his father's face, he would arouse all the bull-like pugnacity in his father's nature, and get all his father's barristerial ability, and his unequalled powers of debate at his back. Was he justified in arousing that long sleeping volcano of shrewd logical scorn; in calling into activity the very worst part of his father's character—jealous, suspicious hatred of every one who crossed him; even in such a good cause as this? Why, no. But he did it without flinching. This thing had to be done, and therefore must be done, quickly and cheaply, and with the handiest materials. What a narrow young Buonaparte it was at this time!

"His father's own son," said the Princess once, little dreaming in her foolish head that she was, unconsciously of course, speaking the truth.

They had their will. Sir Hugh Brockliss left off attending the board. Silcote's powers of logical scorn, which in old times had promised to put him at the head of one branch of his profession, were too much for the honest kindly country baronet. He wrote a letter to the board, which he and his wife considered to be rather

withering than otherwise. He deeply deplored that certain circumstances—he regretted to say, that his duty as an English gentleman constrained him to admit—of a personal nature prevented his sitting at that board again. When he said, as he did with his hand on his heart, that that board, in its collective capacity, was as intelligent and as gentlemanlike a body of men as he ever hoped to meet, he made one exception—he regretted to say an individual one. He would not name any names whatever. He would not point the finger of scorn in any direction; but he put it to that board, whether, after the language he had received from an individual member of that board on Tuesday last, he could, with any sense of decency, further assist at their councils. Of that individual member he had no more to say. To that individual member, if he ever spoke to him again (a pleasure, he was bound to add, which he and Lady Brockliss had determined to forego), he should say that the term “pig-headed,” although ostensibly applied to a political party, may be uttered with such distinctness of emphasis that it became personal.

This was Sir Hugh Brockliss’s reply to Silcote’s really fine irony. But they would not have won their game still, if it had not been for old Betts.

A row between terrible old Silcote and pompous honest old Sir Hugh was very good fun, but it was not business. They represented the sentimental part of the affair; and, among a board of Philistine governors, most people will allow that sentiment does not go for much. The Philistines were perfectly ready to clothe the boys decently; but the moving of the school into the country was quite another matter; it meant money.

Here old Betts came out nobly, backing the Squire with endless bundles of papers, which, egged on by Arthur, he had been secretly preparing, and endless rows of figures, calculations of rent, the price of land in the city, the price of land thirty miles from town. The figures were undeniable; the gain was very considerable to the institution. Over and above the cost of a poor tract of land in a romantic situation which they bought, they found they had a very large building-fund in hand. A clever architect was secured, with orders to *reproduce* the school-buildings. In a year it was done, and now that the beautiful mediæval building was removed from the crowded houses of the city, one could see how really beautiful the original design was.

At length there came the last holidays in the old place, and then the very last morning there. James was again alone at school, and awoke in the empty dormitory at daybreak. It was indeed the dawning of a new day and a new life for him.

CHAPTER XV.

ST. MARY'S BY THE LAKE.

THE new clothes which lay at his bedside, into which he put himself with the utmost rapidity, were the first things which attracted him on this very memorable morning. He had never been dressed becomingly before; from a smock frock and heavy ill-fitting boots he had passed to hideous and ridiculous green baize petticoats, with ill-fitting brass lacheted shoes, made of the worst leather; three sizes among two hundred boys. Now he found himself standing alone in the deserted dormitory, in a short pilot jacket, with gold buttons, well cut shepherd's-plaid trousers, nicely made shoes, fit to run a race in, and a pretty cap, with S. M. H. in gold on the forehead. He did not know that he was handsome, and that he looked attractive in his new dress. He had no idea of that. He only knew that the old hideous nightmare of the green baize petticoats was gone for ever, and that now he could walk the streets without being an object of scorn and ridicule to other boys. He *thought* that now he was only as other boys were, and would attract no attention; the fact was, that from an object of contempt he had passed into being an object of envy. His intense pleasure at the transformation made him blush several times, and his intense modesty made him hesitate for a long time before he went down to the lodge. But, casting a parting look—with a somewhat regretful face after all, mind you—on the old white-washed walls, and on the green baize petticoats and heavy shoes, which lay in a heap on the floor, he went down the stairs, and out into the gravelled quadrangle, whose western pinnacles—after doing duty more or less faithfully, for four hundred years, condemned as old materials—were just lit up by the sun of the summer's morning.

Will you follow me through the brightest day in the life of a very good fellow, take him all in all? If you will, read; if you would rather not, skip. I wish to please you, but you do not know how difficult you are to please.

Nearly all the servants of the college had been sent on before, to get in order and arrange the new building, which was now, having had the March wind through it, pronounced to be dry and fit for the reception of pupils, and the working people necessary for their instruction in the fear of God, grammar, and plainsong. James was the only boy so utterly friendless and lonely as to be left up for the midsummer holidays, and he was to travel down with Berry, the old porter, and formally to take possession of

the new building, in the name of the Society of the Hospital of the Blessed Virgin.

James and old Berry were great cronies. They squabbled at times, for James's vivacity now and then took the form of piratical irritating mischief. But any boy who had broken a window in James's company was comfortably assured of one thing, that old Berry would never report James. What was deliberation on the part of any other boy was mere accident in James's case. The master who had the care of such little logic as they learnt, had remarked once ironically, that Sugden's accidents appeared from their frequent recurrence to be inseparable, and might be more correctly described as qualities; but what third master, let him have expended a thousand pounds on his education, can ever hold his own against the porter? It is Seely against Pakington. The porter wins, and James was never formally reported.

"Hi!" said old Berry, as James came into the lodge for his breakfast; "we *are* fine. How nice the boy looks though. You look the gentleman all over."

"I am a gentleman, ain't I?" said James.

"Not you," said Ben Berry. "If you had been you'd have been reported times out of mind. You're no gentleman. Where's your old things?"

"In the dormitory."

"Fetch 'em along."

"Why?"

"To keep 'em by you, to remind you that fine feathers don't make fine birds. I ain't been consulted about this new move myself; if I had been, I should have gone agin it most likely. Still, I likes the look on it pretty well this morning. But fetch they old things along, James Sugden, as was shepherd's boy. If you ever forget what you was, and forget the mother that has been going up and down in front of these gates many a time when you have been at football or marbles, I'll report you for the next window as sure as you are born."

"My mother?" said James.

"Ah! your mother!" said Ben Berry. "But what the odds about she? Leastways now. You and I was always comfortable together, and no man can say as I ever reported you. Come, get your breakfast, my dear boy. I have always stood your friend, James Sugden; and if I spoke strongish just now, why I am an old man, and you young ones tries us at times. But I never reported you, James, and you wouldn't desert me now."

"Desert you, Ben? I ain't going to desert you!"

"I know you wouldn't. I know you'll see me through this

moving. I ain't moved from here, from this lodge, for thirty year; and since then these pesky railways have turned up: and I'm afeared on 'em. Come, James, see me through to-day. I never reported you, and, by Job, if you get me safe down there, I never will, not if you were to burn the place down under my nose. And you might, you know; because, in a mind constituted like yours, there's the elements of as outrageous a young toad as I've seen in thirty year. You sleep on that warning, my young friend."

"All right, Ben. I'll take you down safe enough."

The passengers by the nine o'clock train from Vauxhall could not help noticing with extreme interest the handsome, well-grown boy in the neat uniform, who so assiduously led about and attended to the fidgety, queer-looking old man in grey. Those who were early saw that the pair were friends, for they had half a dozen comical squabbles together—the old man going the wrong way systematically, and growling at everything, and the boy chaffing him and laughing at him. They were such a quaint, interesting couple; the joyous brightness and the brisk laughter of the boy contrasted so prettily with the comical, good-humoured cynicism of the old man, that a certain General, egged on by his wife, accosted them, to find out who they were.

"What uniform do you wear, my boy, and where are you going?"

"The uniform of St. Mary's Hospital, sir, and I am going to Basingstoke," for there was no shyness or shame now—that was all left behind with the green petticoat. And James was so radiant, so brisk, and so bold on this crystal summer's morning, that he would have spoken up to the Queen herself.

"You happy boy," said the General; "I would, but for one thing, change places with you."

"And what is that thing, sir?" said James, with perfect innocence.

The General looked at his wife, and they laughed. "Come in the carriage with us, my boy," she said.

"I should like to," said James, "I should like to go anywhere with *him*," indicating the General by a nod; "but I have promised to take care of Ben Berry, and we are going third class."

"He will be all right," said the General. "Come with us, and I will pay the difference."

"No. I am much obliged to you. I never break my promises. Besides, he has been mewed up there so long, thirty years and odd, that he would be lost without me."

"How did he get on before he had you to take care of him, you very old and sagacious gentleman?"

"Well enough. Got from the stool to the gate, and from the gate back to the stool, in the most perfect manner, for thirty odd years—I should say, as far as I can judge, the most perfect school porter that ever lived. But he has got old, and wants a proper head to guide him: we shall all come to that some day, I suppose. Your offer is very kind, but I really must go and look after my friend."

"Don't be too sharp, little man," said the General. "What is your name?"

"Have I been talking too fast, sir?" asked James, wistfully. "I think I *am* a little beside myself this morning. My name, sir, is James Sugden. I was a shepherd boy, and was presented to St. Mary's by Squire Silcote of Silcotes, to whom, in the main, we owe the new change in the school."

"Captain Silcote's father," said Mrs. General. And her husband added, "A bad family; well, I am glad he has been doing some good. He had need."

It was high noon before this queer pair of travellers arrived at their destination, and, after driving in a fly ten miles from Basingstoke, saw the dear old building, which they had left in London, before them again, reproduced perfectly, from the dormitory windows down to the gargoyles and pinnacles of the chapel. Reproduced indeed; but in what a strange way! What an astounding piece of magic was this! They had left the old building that morning in London, hemmed in by ignoble houses on every side; in the hot noon, they found it again, standing on a lofty promontory, which thrust itself out into a beautiful lake. Behind the college, and to the right of it, the dark Scotch fir woods rolled away, tier beyond tier, the building standing out before them like some new carved toy. In front there was the lake, calm under the noonday sun; and all around, shutting out the horizon everywhere, rolled the hills, in sheets and scarps of purple blooming heather.

It was a wonderfully beautiful sight—those who have had the luck to see Mitchet Pond on the Basingstoke Canal may guess how beautiful. Very few people know the great beauty of those desolate Hampshire lakes, lying on the Bagshot Sands. They have a *specialité* of their own, from Frimley to Sowley, a distance of some seventy miles. All that a hopelessly poor soil, inferior forms of vegetation, and solitude can do for one, they do. At times they are romantic, as at Mitchet, and at this lake of Purley; but all of them on the hottest summer's day, suggest to one wild

sweeping winter winds, and warm winter ingle nooks. The sounds of agricultural life are seldom heard upon their desolate margin. The bittern startles some solitary cow in its flapping and noisy flight, and the snipe bleats in the place of the lamb.

In this beautiful building, standing where the forest, the lake, and the moorland met, the lad spent a long, hot, solitary summer, the happiest of his life. The solitude did him little harm, and the freedom did him great good. For instance, in his long, lonely rambles over the great sea-like expanses of heath, from one cape of forest to another, his work of the last half came to him with a new meaning. Virgil and Horace were not mere puzzles of scaming, mere wearisome exercises of memory. In these long rambles he sometimes repeated the passages he knew, from sheer *ennui* or vacuity; he began to find their meaning, and by degrees to admire them, and long that school might begin again, and that he might know more of them. Of English poetry he knew nothing: that was a later revelation. He says now, in his fanciful way, that the undoubted purity and beauty of his outline comes from the fact that he had not debauched his soul with post-classical literature until he was nearly seventeen. Probably the plain truth is, that he has a keen, steady eye, and a keen, steady hand, and that the kind, genial soul, which is inside the man, acts on the dexterous eye and hand, and reproduces itself. If he chooses to assert that correct drawing can only be got at by an exclusive study of the classics, let him say so. He is not the first man who has talked nonsense about art, and some of our cynical friends may say, certainly not the last.

Whether she had been cruel or kind, he had always feared or admired Nature; but the fantastic, broken prettiness of Berkshire had puzzled and confused him. A kaleidoscope is one thing; a painted window by Kaulbach at Cologne is another. In this new Paradise he for the first time saw great simple outlines—long lines of forest, long horizons of heather, sometimes at his furthest point southward broken by the square tower of a great cathedral, with the sea gleam beyond; and he essayed to draw them, but could not, nor ever could to his satisfaction. Amateurs generally begin their brief career amidst mountain scenery: a mountain like Schehallion or Mont Cervin would set nine men out of ten to work to paint it. He had no such luck; he tried to draw the dull, simple lines of the Hampshire landscape, as being the first thing which he recognised as drawable. He failed so utterly that Ben Berry, the old porter, refused entirely to recognise the landscape on any terms. And so James, in spite, late one evening, in the lodge, sitting, with his shoes and coat off

on the table, drew old Ben himself, and did it uncommonly well—at least, so every one said except the new drawing-master, who set him at once at pitchers and stiles.

In time summer flamed into autumn. The beds were all made in the new dormitories; the new organ was tuned ready for the first day's service. The old masters had dined together in the new hall, and had sniffed, with intense delight, the sweet air of autumn from the Hampshire moors; and at last the boys, wondering and delighted at their new dress, and at the strange, beautiful paradise in which they found themselves, had come swarming back. James was king among them. He had mastered the new situation, and was always afterwards referred to about cross-country business. He fairly kept the lead he had taken. He had learnt to swim during the holidays, and was almost the only boy who could swim well. October was mild that year; and on the first day, before the whole school, he swam across the lake and back again, and became for a time a hero among these town-bred boys. It was little enough to do; they could most of them do it the next summer; but it gave him a temporary prestige, which was very much increased by Squire Silcote sending him a couple of sovereigns, when he was advised of this wonderful Leander feat by a faithful friend of both parties.

"You are now," said this faithful friend—Arthur, of Balliol, who turned up here, as he did everywhere else, for no assignable reason—"fairly launched. While you were dressed in those wretched petticoats I could not do you the injustice to introduce you to a certain pleasant family, where there are boys and girls of your own age. At Christmas you will be asked to my brother's house, and will there see a side of life which will be perfectly new to you."

Accordingly he paid his visit to Lancaster Square, and after the Christmas holidays Reginald accompanied him back to school.

CHAPTER XVI.

GARIBALDI AND KOSSUTH ARE STARTLED BY THE APPARITION OF
MADAME GEORGEY.

LEAVING now for a time the fresh and free Englishlike atmosphere of Purley lake, I must ask my reader to accompany me into quite a different one: into the atmosphere which has been made by the

collision between European courts and dynastic traditions and democracy combined with "the doctrine of nationalities"—which atmosphere, here in England, generally offers itself to the outward senses with a scent of seedy broadcloth and bad cigars.

Who is there among us who has not in his time met a political exile: who is there who has not met one whom he has admired, and got to like? They are bores, you say. Certainly their cause is a bore. Certainly, at odd times, when one is busy, Polish and Hungarian politics *are* a bore; and one does get sick, when one is otherwise employed, of being taken by the button, and having a fresh arrangement of the map of Europe laid before one in a shrill treble, the bass of which consists of a denunciation of the unutterable wickedness of England, for not, with a hundred and forty thousand men, hardly collected, and costing a hundred a year apiece, overrunning Europe with two million of soldiers, and enforcing at the point of the bayonet emancipation of nationalities, and what the Americans call a "Liberal Platform." The cause was always a bore to many of us, even while we loved them, for we most of us thought that cause hopeless, and they themselves were inclined to be bores; though, thank heaven, the Italians, at all events, by persistent boring, have got what they wanted. And, if you look at it, few great things are done without persistency, which means boredom for uninterested people. Look at the unjust judge. The very man whom I should have the honour to introduce to you directly under the *nom de guerre* of Kriegsthurm, said to me not so very long ago, "Revolution? yes, revolution. Failure once, twice, thrice, but always again revolution. The card must turn up some day."

Yet, in spite of their boring us, few of us who have known anything of them have not had occasion to admire their patience, their frugality, and their charity towards one another. Necessity had first thrown Boginsky the Pole and Count Aurelio Frangipanni the Italian together, and now their respect and friendship for one another, after seeing out so much grinding poverty together, was so great, that to injure one was to arouse the dangerous anger of both.

Frangipanni was a tall, slightly built, gentle-looking man, with a very long face, a good, kindly deliberative eye, and a prominent thin nose. He was neatly, though shabbily, dressed; his face was carefully shaved all over, and his hair was cropped close to his head: his manner was grave, polite, and dignified; he was a gentleman at all points. In politics he was not a democrat himself, but he used to tell you very calmly that he would be willing to make an alliance with the very *parti d'enfer* itself, if it could give him a united Italy.

His beloved Boginsky was a patriot of another order : fierce, dark, mysterious plots were the delight of his really kind heart (never, of course, in any way involving assassination—he was an honest fellow enough). He was a lean, pale young man, of rather large build, without a hair on his deeply-marked face. As far as I can remember, at this period of time, I should say that he was broad-shouldered and athletic. Other things about him are more easily remembered : for instance, the restless defiant pair of eyes, which, however, never set themselves into a scowl at the worst of times ; and the long, thin, delicate dexterous fingers, almost as restless as the eyes. We used to believe that the extreme pallor of his complexion arose from a long imprisonment in a Russian fortress ; possibly want, and incessant application to the trade by which he got his poor living, that of engraving maps—and engraving them, I fear, very badly—had as much to do with it as the imprisonment. I have borrowed the name Boginsky from the Comtesse de Ségur for him. I went to him once about a certain map, and, when he told me his real name, and I found out who he was, I doubt whether I was ever more startled before or since. It was a name which ranked with Garibaldi's or Kossuth's at that time.

I am remembering too much, possibly. Both these gentlemen are now prosperous, and, I think, happy. Italy is united, and Poland dead. That Boginsky, in his quiet Australian farm, weeps at times for his dead Polonia, one cannot doubt ; but she is only a memory. No doubt, also, that Frangipanni, Deputato at Florence, laments his Boginsky ; but the world has not behaved very badly to either of them, all things considered.

I must ask your patience while I introduce Kriegsturm. Kriegsturm was a large, powerful, and now a somewhat fat man, though still strong and active. He was a man with a muddy-red complexion, with a fat jowl, which would never shave quite clean ; a brown, short-cut moustache, a square thick nose, heavy brown eyebrows, and two evil, steady little eyes. A gross, strong man, who fed gluttonously, and ruminated for an hour after meals, with his fat knees crossed, and his cunning little eyes gleaming into quick intelligence whenever there was the least necessity for attention to outward matters. This man got his living ostensibly by keeping a lodging-house, generally frequented by distressed patriots ; he also did a little photography, and a little of a great many other things which we will not particularize. Among other things, he was a fortune-teller and a subsidiser of spiritual mediums, and, somehow, had made a large and very paying connexion in this line among certain of the upper orders.

He was a spy and a traitor; but Boginsky and Frangipanni believed in him, loved him, and trusted him. He was a thorough-going revolutionist, and far shrewder than such men as our two honest friends before-mentioned. And the man had the power, strange to say, of holding these simple gentlemen in leash. When Frangipanni came back to him in '48, naked and wounded, Kriegsthum took him in, and set him up again (let that be mentioned to his credit). "I told you not to go," he said. "I told you the pear was not ripe; and I married a Jewess, and ought to know. And here you are. It will all come in time if you wait for it. A man of your mark should not go Strasbourging and Boulogning. By the by, *his* time will come, you mark my words. Let Boginsky go, if you like: if he *was* knocked on the head, I could find a dozen like him. And, besides, I am not going to have it done yet." The man's shrewdness and power were undeniable, and Boginsky, who limped in later, was obliged to confess that Kriegsthum deserved well of the democracy of Europe. When Garibaldi started for Sicily in 1860, this man ranged and raged through Leicester Square and Kentish Town, arousing the patriotic. "This thing will *do*, I tell you," he said; "the time has come, and the man is on the spot! Don't stint yourselves for money now. Never mind what you owe me. Let it wait. I want the Two Sicilies to begin with. I'll let your three pound fifteen stand."

To this man Kriegsthum our old friend Squire Silcote in later times propounded the question: "Whether or no he did not think himself, on the whole, the greatest scoundrel in Europe?" Kriegsthum laughed in his face so diabolically that Silcote stood silent and aghast with wonder and admiration.

In this man's house—a dull, squalid house, in a back street in Kentish Town—on a dull, rainy day, Frangipanni and Boginsky sat at their work. Count Frangipanni was correcting the Italian exercises of one of his pupils; Boginsky was doing his map-work; and they had sat opposite one another for some hours, scarcely speaking, for bread must be won somehow. It was a dull, dark, dirty room, with what Mrs. Grundy would call a "foreign" smell in it; meaning, I take it, a smell of soup and cigars. But at last a neighbouring clock struck one, and Boginsky cast his graver, or whatever it was, on the table, and cried out in English, for they neither knew well the other's language:—

"Father Frangipanni, I will work no more before dinner; and dinner is due. Father, if thou dottest another *i*, I will denounce thee. Talk to me. My soul is hungry."

"I will talk to thee, dear son, when I have finished my next paragraph. Canst thou never wait?" They thee'd and thou'd one another: they thought from their experience of other languages that it was a proof of familiarity.

"Wait? No. I can never wait. Father, the doctors of medicine in France can open veins and transfuse blood. Father, let us get here a French doctor, and let me have some of your old, cold, waiting blood, passed into my veins. For my heart is like a blazing coal. I want my Mazzini. He satisfies my soul. And he is not here, not there, not nowhere. Have the assassins caught him? Give me my Mazzini, or transfuse to me some of your heart's blood, and teach me to wait."

"Titch me to weet," as he said it. Frangipanni, putting away his pens, ink, and paper with his usual tidiness, smiled at him.

"I do not tell you to wait, dear little Pole," he said. "I do not tell you to hesitate in any way. There is the door, my dear, and outside it you will find George Street, Kentish Town, London, England. Cry Havoc, my dear, and let slip the dogs of war in George Street, hey? You want a little wild talk, my son, and your Mazzini is not handy for you. Talk your wild talk out to me, my son, instead of to your Mazzini. Our dear one is safe, no doubt. I say to you that your temper is too hot about affairs, and the king is not ready. Scold me, dear child."

The dear child Boginsky took him at his word, and scolded with a vengeance.

"King not ready? Did ever you hear of a king who ever was ready, unless he was pushed on behind by an overwhelming democracy? I cry out, from the inmost depths of my burning heart, for a democracy, and you talk to me of kings. Roll a king's head before the coalised scoundrels as Danton did. Let the great heart of every nation speak out in a universal suffrage."

"As in Poland for instance, my child," said Count Frangipanni. "How—knowing, as you do, that the peasantry are most naturally bound to the Russian side, to the side of order, to the side which will give them some sort of peace and security—can you talk such nonsense? Kings are of value, orders are of value. All should be utilised in the great cause of nationality, with democracy if necessary, without democracy if possible. Come, child, no more of it. Am I not an aristocrat myself? You forget your manners, my dear; and you forget also that you are an aristocrat yourself: proscribed it is true, but Louis Napoleon Buonaparte was proscribed till the day before yesterday. Nothing can ever make you anything but Count Boginsky, you know. And you lose your temper over it all, my son. You entertain personal

feuds, and have your reminiscences. Now you should copy me in that. I have no *personal* feeling towards any one in the world."

Boginsky laughed, and, throwing himself back in his chair, burst into song, set hurriedly to some wild, whirling dance music—and into no despicable kind of song either; for he had a fine tenor voice, a good knowledge of singing, and was, besides, singing very noble words: indeed, there are but few better:—

"I heard last night a little child go singing,
'Neath Casa Guidi windows by the church,
'O bella libertà, O bella!' Stringing
The same words still on notes, he went in search
So high for, you concluded the upspringing," &c., &c.

The older man's face flushed up. "But I have no personal feeling towards any man whatever," he said. "This is not the time for excitement either. Be quiet."

No personal feeling whatever, my dear Count Aurelio Frangipanni? You are quite sure about that? You and Boginsky had argued together about politics a long time, and you had always ended by asserting that you had no personal feeling against any one in the world: while our wild young Boginsky was for hanging up half the European statesmen in a row. The above conversation with Boginsky is not very important, and is only a variation on a hundred others; but it ended by proving that you *had* a strong personal feeling against one man at least.

For, while they were idly waiting for their dinner—Frangipanni having pronounced against singing of all kinds, even against Barrett Browning engrafted on Strauss, and certainly producing revolutionary fruit—there came a ring at the bell. Then there was a conference in the passage; and then the draggle-tail servant girl, a shrewd enough little cockney on most occasions, who had shown in more princes than one into that parlour in her time, and who did the general work of the house, opened the door, and said—

"If you please, sir, here is the Prince of Castelnuovo."

The effect of the little cockney maid's words was something fearful to see. The calm middle-aged gentleman, Count Frangipanni, without the slightest personal feeling towards any one in the world, bounded on his feet, and cried out, "Death and fury! give me my sword! Is he mad to hunt me down here? My sword, Boginsky! my sword! Traitor, you are holding me!" And the ferocious and sanguinary democrat, who was ready to hang up half the statesmen in Europe in a row, threw himself on his brother count, and held him back by sheer force, saying,

"Now you are going to make a fool of yourself, you know. You would be an assassin at this moment if I was not here to take care of you. Sit down in that chair and hold your tongue. You have bitten your mouth in your passion, and the blood is running. Suck your lower lip, and swallow the blood. Don't let *him* see it; and, if you possibly can, sit quiet, and let me do the talking."

Count Frangipanni had done what he hated doing beyond most men—had made a fool of himself, and been detected in the act by a very pretty woman. He was standing in the middle of the room, towering up in a dignified attitude, white with rage, the very veins in his forehead swollen, and Count Boginsky was still holding him back with both hands, and begging him to be calm; when there entered to them a very handsome woman in a white bonnet, a rich white lace shawl over a silver-grey moire antique dress, and delicately fitting cream-coloured gloves—a monstrous contrast to their shabby squalor—who began, "I beg a thousand pardons," and then stopped in sheer wonder at the astounding appearance of the two men before her.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PRINCESS, AFTER AN INEFFECTUAL EFFORT TO COMPOSE MATTERS BETWEEN ITALY AND AUSTRIA, HAS A LITTLE TABLE-RAPPING.

COUNT FRANGIPANNI was the first to recover his presence of mind. He advanced, blushing deeply, towards our old acquaintance the Princess of Castelnuovo. Boginsky stood staring open-mouthed, utterly taken aback at what one may be allowed to call this "sell," and apparently very much inclined to laugh.

Frangipanni took her for a foreigner, probably because she was so well dressed, and spoke to her in his kind of French. "I owe Madame a thousand apologies for discovering me in such a lamentable disorder. My serene Madame will have the complacency to bend her powerful mind to understand that I am getting old, and am subject to *éblouissements*. The sudden announcement of the name of so eminent a princess,"—here he began to remember that she was an Englishwoman—"of one so devoted to the Ted—I babble—to the Austrian interests, produced a recurrence of my malady. I am unfortunately Italian in my sympathies. The noble kinsman of Madame,

unless I delude myself, ornaments still the court of Vienna. May I do the honours of our miserable *ménage*, and may I receive the commands of Madame ? ”

Madame, with her silly good-nature, never cared to inquire his name. “ You may depend on it,” she said in *her* French, which was much queerer than Frangipanni’s, “ that these *éblouissements* are all nonsense. Don’t let them cause you any inconvenience. A *soupçon* of brandy in your tea of a morning will set you all right. Every one has them more or less, though you certainly do seem to suffer more than most, I must say. None of you Italian patriots have much digestion to speak of, you know : that is why you are so troublesome. But I am seeking Herr Kriegsthurin, and that silly girl told me he was here. I make then my apologies and withdraw.”

And she withdrew. Boginsky had time to say, “ Is that the Englishwoman whom the traitor Castelnuevo married for her money ? ” when she came back again, and, standing before the door, opening and shutting her parasol, said, in her native tongue, “ Does Monsieur speak English ? ”

“ He does.”

“ Will you allow me to say, sir, that I hope there is no ill-will between us. I begin to think that I know Monsieur’s face, though I cannot remember his name. Will he favour me with it ? ”

“ To oblige Madame, anything. I am the unhappy Count Aurelio Frangipanni.”

“ Oh, my good gracious goodness ! ” said the poor Princess, dissolving into tears, and using a lace pocket-handkerchief most unaffectedly. “ This is the most dreadful thing which ever happened to me. My dear sir, I give you my honour that I thought you had been dead some time. And to find you alive, and in this miserable state, makes me so deeply unhappy. Can I do nothing ? ”

“ Madame’s disappointment at finding me alive is most natural. Madame’s offer of assistance is most natural also, as it comes from her kind and generous heart. But she must, with her intuitive good taste, perceive that the acceptance of any such offers is impossible on my part. I feel sure that Madame will see that without taking offence at my plain speech.”

So spoke the Italian gentleman to the Englishwoman whom he hated and despised, and whose husband had betrayed him most shamefully, in more ways than one, as he believed by her instigation. There was just a little irony in it, but the Princess had not brains enough to see it.

"I am so very sorry for all that took place, Count, and politics are politics, and your side were not blameless, you know, and I have plenty of money, and I am sure that my sainted Massino, now in glory, would approve almost anything you would mention in a pecuniary point of view. Do think of it."

"I will, Madame, and politely decline it."

"I am afraid I have offended you by the offer of money. Forgive me. I am powerful at Vienna: I represent the Protestant interest there to a certain extent. Can I do nothing politically for you? If you could manage—to manage you know—so far as to let me take in your submission; I could manage almost anything for you. Now do speak the word, my dear soul, because I really had not anything to do with it."

So she dragged her coarse-toothed harrow over the nervous and delicate, almost fanatical, soul of poor Count Frangipanni. It seems that the men who came back in the best case from the ghastly nightmare Moscow expedition were the Neapolitans—the most sensitive, most passionate, and yet the most enduring of men. Count Frangipanni was one of them.

"Madame's offers are most politely declined," said he, very gently indeed.

"Then," she said, "I wish you would tell me where Kriegsturm is."

We have most of us known more than one man who is under the delusion that if you curse and swear in a foreign language, God does not hear you; indeed it is not an uncommon delusion. Kriegsturm, who had overheard the whole of this from the open door of the parlour, across the passage, must have been under this impression, or he never would have dared to swear to himself in the way he did. Polyglot spy as he was, he exhausted nearly every oath in Europe over the unutterable stupidity of the servant-girl who had brought about this *rencontre*. The Princess's very presence there, inquiring for him, he argued, would prove that he had at one time been in relation with the traitorous Italian-Austrian party; and if she accidentally let out anything about their former relations—which, as the most loose-tongued woman he had ever met, she was very likely to do—Frangipanni and Boginsky would set it about among other refugees not so scrupulous as themselves, and it would be totally impossible for him to leave England without the chance of a knife between his ribs. "And what the mischief does she want here?" he kept asking himself in the intervals of swearing. "Does she want foreign intelligence, or hanky-panky, or what the deuce does she want?"

Hanky-panky, it appeared. She wanted spiritual intelligence

of the last moment, on a subject which had agitated and distressed her extremely. She had scarcely taken her seat, and had not been half a minute in the room, when she had told him thus much. The wonderfully dexterous scoundrel was perfectly ready for her even in that time, and interrupted her.

"My dear patroness need not delay over preliminaries. I have been, in consequence of the spiritual *rapport* which exists between your highness and myself, in a state of extreme agitation for these two hours. You have only to look at me, madam, to see that I speak the truth."

"How will that do as to time?" he thought. "I know she has come straight to me; but did she get the news at Silcote's or in town? And what the deuce is it?"

He certainly did look disturbed; even such a cunning rogue as he cannot swear himself into a blind rage one minute, and remove all traces of it in the next. The Princess was very much delighted.

"I was certain that we were still *en rapport*, my faithful Kroigsturm. How can I reward you?"

"By sharing your anxiety with me, madam. It is worry enough that I, in the interests of the court of Vienna, board at my house two dark assassins. I beg you to remove this new cause of anxiety as quick as possible."

"Then you have no notion of its cause?" asked the Princess.

"Madam, what time have I had to consult any of the usual oracles?" And he reflected, "The first shot was a good one with regard to time; she has heard something in London." Then he went on. "But you are fatigued with your long journey, madam; long travelling in a railway is most fatiguing, and the Great Western carriages are not well ventilated. May I get you a glass of wine?" All because he knew the woman's habit of chattering, and because he knew, also, that suggestions of time and place would suggest ordinary ideas to her feeble mind, and make her chatter.

"I have not come far," she said, "I got my cab at the end of York Street. So I had not far to walk. I am not tired, but I am very much distressed."

He had it all now. She had come from the barracks.

"I have been distressed myself, madam, for a long time on the same subject. The original mischief arose from Mars crossing Venus at the hour of nativity in the house of death. Your nephew has not been to blame; no man could fight against such influences."

"I don't understand astrology," said the poor Princess.

("Thank heaven!" thought Kriegsthurm, "for I am sure I don't. What an awful fool this woman is! I wonder what she will stand over this business?") "I am sure, as you say, that my poor Thomas, my favourite nephew, has been born under evil influences, and is not in the least to blame. But I want a spiritual consultation with you, as to whether his father is likely to pay his debts after this dreadful *fiasco*, and if not, what is to be done. This last business is the worst of all, and the Horse Guards have taken it up."

"We had better have a spiritual consultation, madam. I think everything is ready. Shall we begin? We cannot begin too soon," he added; for he wanted time to think, and did not know as much as he wished.

"Will you darken the room?" said the Princess.

Not if he knew it, thought Kriegsthurm; he wanted to watch that foolish handsome face in broad daylight. "The spirits who communicate with me, madam, do not require darkness," he said; and so the rogue and the fool sat down, and put their hands on a table. This seems wearisome and ridiculous; but please to remember that, scarcely four years ago, a large minority of educated people were either playing at, or playing with the same idiotic game, and that many are playing at it still.

"If you are not going to darken the room," said the Princess, "I think I *will* take a glass of sherry. I am so awfully afraid of seeing something. I don't mind the knocking so much after a time, but I couldn't bear to see anything. I should die of fright."

She had her sherry, and they sat down again. For a very long time there was silence, but at last the Princess gave a scream, for which Kriegsthurm, now on the high horse, rebuked her with a scowl. The rapping had begun with what Mr. Dickens calls "a runaway carriage double." Kriegsthurm frowned her into silence, and began taking down the numbers of the raps on a piece of paper with a pencil. The raps all came from beneath the table in rapid unaccountable groups, and by degrees, the table became agitated, and they had to stand up, and then the table, being deprived of the assistance of Kriegsthurm's great ugly sausage-like knee, became quiet again. I don't know how he managed the matter, but it was like a fourth-class amateur conjuring-trick from beginning to end—not to be compared to Frikell or Stodare's worst; but having to do it before a very silly person, he dared, like those gentlemen, to do it in daylight. The result is what we have to do with, however. When the raps had ceased, the table was quiet, and he had had time to think the

matter over, it appeared that the following was the communication from the other world :—

“Captain Tom Silcote has undoubtedly made a worse mess of it than ever he had done before. There is no chance whatever of his father’s paying his debts again ; and any attempt of his most amiable aunt’s doing the like thing will bring on her the anger of the spirits, at present well intended towards her, and may induce them to plague her, for her good, with a Poltergeist. There is no fear that Captain Silcote will marry the Signora Maritornes, being married already, and knowing well what he is about. He had better go to Vienna (“Cheeze it abroad,” it stood in the original pencil MS., before Kriegsthurm had time to bring his mind to bear on details), where his aunt’s purse and influence will aid him. Outlawing will be his portion ; and let him keep clear of dark places in Italian territory, lest they should find out that he is his dear aunt’s nephew.”

So much had he time to concoct under the circumstances. He got rid of his visitor, and went anxiously back to his two lodgers.

They had no earthly suspicion of him : as loyal gentlemen themselves, they never dreamt that a man who had become their familiar friend in misfortune could be a traitor and a spy. Frangipanni talked persistently in a solemn monotone about his wrongs in general, and the injuries received from Castelnovo, all dinner time ; and warned Kriegsthurm against having anything to do even with his English wife, who could not but be treacherous from the name she bore.

As for Thomas Silcote, his *fiasco* was in the morning papers. In a spirit of sheer mischief, he had persuaded that reckless Spaniard, Madame Maritornes, to go for a tour, leaving her engagement, at the cost of thousands upon thousands to herself, and the great indignation of the public. It was so openly and notoriously the work of Thomas Silcote, and came at the end of so many other shameful scandals, that his collapse was instantaneous. The army authorities interfered, and he was recommended to sell out. Frantic efforts were made by some of the tradesmen to catch him, but he anticipated all the *ne exeats* and arrived safely in Vienna.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SOME OF THE SQUIRE'S PLANS FOR ARTHUR.

"AND so that business is over and done with," said the Squire to Arthur one morning before lunch. "And now the best thing you can do is to go over this afternoon and begin to make the agreeable to the eldest Miss Granby. It will be all right; I sounded old Granby on the matter. And at the same time write to those Oxford people, and resign your fellowship—cut the shop altogether, and pitch your white tie overboard at the same time. It is not too late even now to leave the Church and go to the Bar. Don't let me see those black clothes any more. You must act up to your new position. One parson in a family is well enough, but the head of a family never ought to be in orders."

Silcote said all this in a blundering halting sort of way, with his eyes turned from his son, wandering up and down; he jingled his watch-chain also while he was saying it, and was evidently doubtful, if not actually afraid, of the way in which it would be received. He was not at all reassured by Arthur saying, very coolly,—

"I don't half understand you. I think we must have an explanation."

The Squire knew perfectly well how hopeless it was to attempt to bully Arthur. Still, no point would be lost by riding the high horse at first, whereas one or two points might be gained. He was so afraid of Arthur that he had never unrolled his new plans to him, but had trusted that, when they were all in train and half-accomplished, Arthur would submit to them from necessity. Hence his confused announcement of them, which puzzled Arthur extremely.

"I am going to submit to no explanations or discussions whatever. You are now the heir of the house, and I shall trouble you to behave as the heirs of great families are generally expected to behave; with submission to the head of the house. Yesterday you were nobody, a mere fellow of Balliol or some such place. To-day you are the heir to a very great property; and, with your talents, you must end in the House of Lords. I have let you have your own way while you were a younger son. I insist that you obey my will now you are the elder."

"You don't mean to say that you have disinherited Tom?"

"Of course I have disinherited that scoundrel, sir. This morning I have made a new will, leaving the whole of the property

unreservedly to you. But I will have my conditions fulfilled. Nothing can prevent my leaving everything to St. Mary's Hospital if I choose. It does not take long to make a will, sir."

"You have done a very foolish thing, and a very unfair thing," replied Arthur, steadily. "Tom will do very well in time, and it was you who spoilt him, as you are spoiling Anne. As regards myself, you might have had the civility to consult me before burdening me with this wretched property and its responsibilities, and ruining all my plans for the future. I have marked out a plan of life for myself, and the possession of great wealth don't enter into that plan at all,—in fact, would ruin it. Conceive a man of my talents and ambition, and with my fanatical ideas of the responsibilities of wealth, having to drag out his life among the wretched details of a large English estate! You must be mad."

"Better men than you have done so, sir."

"H'm," said Arthur. "Well, giving you that point, the more fools they. If you don't do your duty by your estate, you are a rascal; if you do, you cut yourself off from everything which makes life valuable. You, for one instance, make yourself a member of a particular order, and by degrees imbibe the prejudices of that order. I'll defy any man in the world to associate habitually with one set of neighbours, and not take up with their prejudices. And I want no prejudices. There is priggishness enough at Oxford for me. A word or a phrase too often repeated gets a fictitious value, and at last is worshipped as a sacred truth; and he who dares handle it in any way roughly is a heretic and a villain: the word Reform, for instance. Now about Miss Granby. I have not the honour of the young lady's acquaintance. May I ask why her name was mentioned just now, as a matter of curiosity?"

"She has eighty thousand pounds, Arthur, and, if I could see her my daughter-in-law, I should not have a wish ungratified."

"You want to see her eighty thousand pounds in the family?"

"Precisely."

"Then why don't you marry her yourself? You are not old, you are quite as good-looking as ever I remember you to have been, and she would sooner have you than me. There would not be the same disparity in your ages. You know she is old enough to be my mother."

"Then you are determined to thwart me in this?"

"Most assuredly."

"Take care, sir."

"I shall take very good care I don't marry Miss Granby."

Come, don't let us quarrel ; we quite understand one another. Tom will distinguish himself, and be taken back into favour again. You know he has got a commission in the Austrian army ? ”

“ No. It is impossible. The regulations would not permit of it.”

“ Nothing is impossible to our aunt, the Princess, at Vienna, it seems. *She* has managed it. He is fiddling at the top of the tune there.”

“ With her money, I suppose ? ”

“ So *I* suppose.”

“ He will ruin her, as he would have ruined me.”

“ I fear there is very little doubt of it.”

“ Can't you warn her ? ”

“ Yes, I can warn her, and so I can warn her brother, my most gracious father ; and so I can warn the thorough-going Radicals : but with the same result in every case.”

“ It is a bad business,” said the Squire. “ Your aunt is very foolish, Arthur. And she has got a very pretty bit of money of her own. She has a terrible slippery tongue, but she can't have a bad heart. Arthur, I believe she is very fond of me still, and I have not spoken a civil word to her this twenty years.”

“ More shame for you,” said Arthur. “ Why can't you be kind to her ? It is all nonsense, you know.”

“ Is it ? ” said the Squire. “ Come, I wish you would drink some more of this wine ; it is real Clos Vougeot, of the first *crus*. I imported the hogshead with Cass of Northcote and Sir Charles Hazelburn ; you can get no such claret at Oxford.”

“ I am aware of it ; but I take very little wine.”

“ I fear you don't take enough. What makes you so pale ? You get paler year by year : sometimes you look quite ghastly.”

“ Yet I never look *ill*, do I ? I work a great deal—a very great deal—and very much by night. In consequence of something a fellow-tutor said to me a few years ago, I determined to work mathematics up to the Cambridge standard, and I have done so. I am now examiner, and correcting the papers last term has pulled me down. Don't mention my health. I dislike it. I am perfectly well.”

“ On your honour ? ”

“ On my honour. I have never had a day's illness since I was a boy. The reason I dislike the mention of it is that, to me, the loss of health would be such a hideous disaster.”

“ I wish I could see you well married, Arthur.”

“ I thought we had done with Miss Granby.”

“ So we have, if you like. One could as soon make water mix

with oil as make you marry any one you did not like ; unless you made it out to be your duty, and it don't seem to be a part of your duty to obey your father. We will say nothing more about her. I should not object to any other, provided she was—— ; provided she met your views, of course. Is there such a one ? ”

Arthur, usually so pale, was, in spite of himself, burning red as he answered steadily, “ No.”

“ You are perfectly certain that you mean what you say, Arthur, and that there is no young lady whatsoever ? ”

“ I am perfectly certain,” replied Arthur, looking his father steadily in the face, and getting by degrees less fiery hot about the ears. “ There is no one whatever ! ”

“ I am delighted to hear it,” said the Squire. “ It is a great relief to my mind. That sort of thing never does, depend upon it—— Well, I'll say no more. Now, can I do anything for you ? You must want some money.”

“ I don't want any money, thank you. But I should be very glad if you would reconsider the measure of turning the Widow Granmore and her sons out of their farm.”

“ They shall stop in if you like, at *your* request.”

“ I only want justice done. I only want to see that you don't do yourself more injustice with the country. What is your case ? ”

The Squire stated it eagerly and volubly—delighted to have a chance of justifying himself before a perfectly unbiassed person. “ Case, sir ? it is all on my side. I allowed her and three lubberly sons to keep the farm on after Granmore's death, on certain conditions as to crops and fences, not one of which has been fulfilled ; they have neither brains, energy, or capital to fulfil them. She is ruining my land. She is destroying the capital on which she professes to be paying interest. She is living on me. She is breaking every law of political economy ; and I have given her notice. I cannot have my land destroyed by other people's widows ; but, after all, it is as good as *your* land now, and, if you say let her stay, she shall stay. Only I warn you that, if you are going to manage the estate on these principles, you had better let me marry Miss Granby in real earnest, and accept a rent charge.”

“ Well,” said Arthur, “ in strict justice your case is a good one ; she has certainly no more right to ruin your land than to pick your pocket. Send the baggage packing. You are only a capitalist, you know, and must, in mere honesty towards the State, behave as any other capitalist. If she is actually over-cropping the land, she ought to go on every ground. I am quite convinced.” And so Arthur rose, whistling.

“Is there no middle course?” said the Squire, before he had reached the door.

“Eh?”

“Any middle course. Nothing short of turning her out?”

“Oh yes, there is a middle course, if you think yourself justified in pursuing it. Renew her lease for a shorter term on more stringent conditions, and lend her some money at four per cent. to start with. She knows what she is about fast enough. That is a middle course. I don’t recommend it, or otherwise; I only point it out.”

“Well, I will follow your advice then, young sir. Is it the new fashion at Oxford to incur obligations and shirk out of the acknowledgment of them,—to persuade a man to do what you wish in such an ill-conditioned manner that the obligation actually appears to be on your side? I will do as you wish, Arthur, and most humbly thank you for asking me.”

Arthur left the room, and was gone about ten minutes. When he returned he came in very gravely, and laid his hand on the Squire’s shoulder.

“Father,” he said, “I thank you very heartily for all your kindness to me, more particularly in this matter about the farm. I will, in everything, follow your wishes as far as they do not interfere with my private judgment. I have not behaved well to you to-night, and I ask your forgiveness.”

CHAPTER XIX.

SOME OF ARTHUR’S PLANS FOR HIMSELF.

It cost him something to say those last words, even to his own father.

How far can a man, even of the strongest will, succeed in curing the faults of his character? He may repress them, and hide them from the eyes of other people almost entirely, but they are there incubating. And when the moral system gets out of order, the moral gout gets twitching again. A man has generally contracted all the faults of character he will ever be plagued with this side of the grave before he is sixteen; some being hereditary, some coming through foolish education, and some through evil opportunity. The life of the most perfect saint would be the life

of a man who by misfortune had found himself at years of discretion the heir to a noble crop of evil moral instincts, including of course the accursed root of the whole evil tree, selfishness; and yet who had succeeded, through all states of ill-health, poverty, and the temptation of prosperity in keeping them in repression; in never even betraying to the world the fact of the temptation; the fact of the evil disposition existing at all; knowing himself to be often in wish a sinner, yet, acting throughout his life in every relation like a saint. Such a character is possible, and yet even of such a character one could not say that he had *cured* his worse instincts; one could only say that he had most nobly suppressed them.

There are those who hold the very noble and glorious belief that, through the grace of God, and the persistent imitation of Christ, evil instincts themselves become eradicated, and at the last that the soul itself quits the body in perfect accord with her Saviour. Of such a divine creed let us speak with reverence, and deep admiration. We have not to do with such great and deep matters here; but only to watch how circumstances acted on a clever man's habits of mind, changing them from time to time.

We were speaking of Arthur Silcote; a man who took pride in dextrously, and with shrewd common sense, steering clear of the Pantheists of those times on the one hand and the Tractarians on the other; and destructively snapping, bitterly enough at times, at the weak points of each; and constructively building up a most queer and adaptive form of orthodoxy, which the more advanced and embittered spirits on either side agreed (in that if in nothing else) would certainly get him a bishopric in the end.

He was no saint, although a man of perfect purity in morals, and one who made duty and self-sacrifice (as he thought) the first object of his life. If you told him that ambition and love of power were the mainspring of most of his actions, he would honestly admit it, and say coolly in addition that he felt himself fit for power, and that it was therefore his duty to acquire it. Continual and uninterrupted success from his very youth had developed in him that form of selfishness which we call self-confidence. He had, *with* his self-confidence, taken stock of this same vice among other, real and imaginary, imperfections, to be cured in his scheme of making himself a perfect and successful character; and, as Mr. Pip when he wrote out a schedule of his debts and left a margin, thought it was as good as paying them, so Arthur, when he wrote down "overweening self-confidence" in the analysis of his character, alongside of gluttony and laziness, thought that the former devil, being *en visage*, was of necessity laid with the two others.

Nevertheless Arthur had been a prig at school sometimes, and, in spite of all his spasmodic efforts to the contrary, was a little of one now. He was a man whose goodness shamed one, but he was without the quality of *bonhomie* now, as he was five years before, when the old tutor at Balliol warned him of this fault in his character, and when he so faithfully determined to mend it.

His influence among undergraduates was less than nothing. The year of his proctorship he was nearly howled out of the theatre; although no one was able to bring a single case of injustice against him. Perfectly without blame himself, he was utterly unable to make allowances for lads scarcely younger than himself. He had been warned about the reckless stinging use of his tongue by wise and good friends, and he thought he had conquered that habit at least; but with overwork the old habit came back, and his sentences against undergraduates were embittered sometimes by cruel words, so that men said they would sooner be rusticated by the other proctor than gated by him. His manner as an examiner, too, was cold, contemptuous, and inexorable; the "shady" man, whose cruel fate left him to Silcote of Balliol, felt himself half plucked before he began. And yet there were about half a dozen men, all of the first mark in the university, who believed in him, as Jourdan believed in the young artillery officer Buonaparte, and who swore that he was not only the cleverest, but the best and kindest fellow alive.

His ideas about women, about their powers of intellect, their great weight in the social scale—whether just or unjust,—their natural capabilities of learning logical reasoning—whether their sentimental conclusions came from an inferior intellect or from the want of a university education—are not of much value, seeing that he knew nothing whatever about them. But he would reel it you off by the yard about women, with his hands in his pockets comfortably, and would leave you with the impression that they were to be tolerated, but that he did not think much of them. Miss Austen! Oh certainly, but then any one could write a novel. Her novels are far better than Smollett's or Fielding's? Certainly, they were more entertaining and were without the element of coarseness. Mrs. Somerville and Miss Herschell? They had shown a certain capacity for figures. Mrs. Hemans? Pretty idea of rhythm and pathos? Miss Barrett? Well, he would give you Miss Barrett, if you came to that, provided you admitted her to be an exception—otherwise would argue on until it was time to knock out of college. Madame Dudevant, then? No, on no account. She only reproduced that rebellion against formulas which expressed itself in the lower thought of the Reformation and the

French Revolution. Mere overstated cases against old formulas did not constitute original thought. She was Heine's youngest sister's ghost, without his powers of epigram or rhythm. Miss Brontë? A good and nervous, though coarse, describer of a narrow landscape. And so on: on this, as on every other subject, apt to be bitter when he knew his subject, and trying to be smart when he did not.

One Christmas-day, as the reader may remember, a most absurd accident threw him very awkwardly against his brother's governess, Miss Lee. He had entertained a considerable objection to that young lady, and his more intimate introduction to her had been exceedingly unfortunate; but fate would have it that he should try to remove that awkwardness by sitting beside her and talking to her. Perfect physical beauty and grace, combined with propinquity and opportunity, will have their due effect as long as there are finely-organised men and women in the world; and so Arthur, by the end of that somewhat memorable evening, discovered that Miss Lee was not understood where she was, and that her studies required directing, and her mind forming; in short, he determined to devote a little of his spare time to taking Miss Lee in hand, and seeing whether or no it was too late to make anything of her.

Apparently there were considerable hopes that Miss Lee would not become an utter castaway. He evidently had great expectations of doing something with her, though it was rather late in the day; some hope of providing her with fixed opinions on which to shape her character, and of giving her an object in life. He took to his task with a will, and Miss Lee's profound submissive reverence evidently gave him satisfaction, for he persevered in a way which drew the warmest praise from his brother. She was ignorant of poetry (she suppressed the fact of a tolerably extensive acquaintance with Byron); she must be introduced to the exquisite tender purity of Tennyson, and have the deeper passages explained to her—sometimes, Madam Dora declares, in the square by moonlight. She was ignorant of history; he was kind enough to read to her aloud the account of a Highland fight, in which thirty people were killed with the usual brutality, in the sonorous prose of the late Lord Macaulay. Further Miss Lee's touch on the piano was most unsatisfactory, it wanted firmness for sacred music; and nothing but Arthur's continued attention cured her of the odious habit of keeping her wrists higher than the keys. In short, it was the old story—Monseigneur amused himself. He was short and sharp with her at times, and at times angry, for the poor girl, though not naturally dull, was dull by habit; and, used as she was to

reckless freedom, at times his drilling and his exigence were almost unbearable.

At first she submitted to him, and used her every effort to please, from mingled motives of respect, of fear, and of the wish to attract him. He was in her eyes a very great man indeed, a king among men, a man respected, consulted, and looked up to by all the other men she knew of, the savage old Squire included; a man whose prestige was paramount in their little world, and whom she, and indeed others, believe to have the same weight and consideration in the world as he had in his own family; there are such men in most families which are removed from the real world. So she had begun by trying to please him, and gain his esteem (and his admiration too, perhaps, for she had a looking-glass); and went on to find that he was wondrous handsome, and that his speech was so pregnantly suggestive of all kinds of unknown knowledge, and of sources of intellectual pleasure of which she had never dreamt, that she had forgot about her beauty, and wondered how he could ever have taken the trouble to notice one so far inferior to him in every way as herself. If after that *fiasco* of his on the Christmas evening, she had thought of attracting him by her face, that idea soon passed away. She forgot herself by comparison of herself with him; in short, to use the old formula, the poor girl fell desperately in love with him. In an innocent silly way she had thought she would have liked a lover to fetch and carry for her. She had got one with a vengeance; but there was no fetch and carry about this one.

And Mr. Arthur all this time? Why, Mr. Arthur could look his father straight in the face and say there was no woman in the case at all, and mean it too. But his temper began to suffer in these times. In Convocation and in Common Room he was getting an ugly name in that way, and his best friends were lamenting it. His enemies, who were many, allowed him any amount of ability, but said that his temper had always been bad, and was getting worse, and that his temper would shelve him effectually. His friends said that there was not a better-hearted fellow in Christendom, but that he was trying too much, and that his nerves were getting shaky. Neither party knew that his fresh irritability arose from the fact that he was thinking too much of his brother's governess, and steadily trying to deny the fact to himself,—that towards the end of each term he had nearly succeeded in forgetting, or believing that he had forgotten, the existence of such a person; but that at the beginning of each vacation his wilful legs carried him to his brother's schoolroom, where he saw her again, and found her improved in intelligence

and beauty each time ; proving by her improvement that she had perpended every hint and suggestion of his, and acted on them with diligent reverence, and an intelligence which seemed to “square” itself (mathematically speaking) month after month, and promised in time to become very great. He began to see that in this sometime dowdy careless girl there existed a very noble nature, and not a little intellect ; and that he had awakened them. He wished he had never seen her a hundred times a week. If he ever, in his inexorable plans, “contracted an alliance” (he had no idea of your Darby-and-Joan marriages), he must have, first of all, “connexion.” Such a preposterous action as that of marrying Miss Lee meant ruin, retirement to a college living, and a wasted life. It was not to be thought of for an instant. And besides, the girl’s manners ! He could not train her in other ways ; but what man could speak to a woman on the subject of manners ? It was a worse matter than the “connexion” business. Yahoo brothers-in-law were bad enough, but they might be pensioned. A wife whose family was without interest was bad enough too ; but a wife who was so utterly without knowledge of some of the ways of the world as was Miss Lee, was quite out of the question.

CHAPTER XX.

SOME OF MR. BETTS’S PLANS FOR HIMSELF AND OTHERS.

ONE of the circumstances which it now becomes necessary to notice more prominently is the extraordinary friendship which had sprung up between Squire Silcote and Mr. Betts.

It had begun in the battle-royal with the Sir Hugh Brockliss faction, about the removal of St. Mary’s Hospital into the country. Mr. Betts’s shrewdness, his bold bull-dog style of fighting, the rough carelessness of speech natural enough in a somewhat coarse man finding himself among superiors, who were perfectly aware of his antecedents, and very much inclined to snub him ; more than all, perhaps, his intense dislike and contempt for Sir Hugh Brockliss—natural enough, also, for men of his class are very apt to hate the class next above them : all these things, combined with the profoundest respect for the Squire himself, had won Silcote’s heart, and he had admitted Betts to his intimacy in a wonderful

manner. As time went on he found that Mr. Betts suited him, and became necessary to him; and Arthur, coming suddenly from Oxford once, was very much astonished to find Mr. Betts quietly ensconced opposite his father before the fire, with dessert and wine between them, as comfortable as could be.

"This is queer," he thought, "but it may lead to good. Algernon's head trumpeter as the governor's chief confidant. If the fellow will not trumpet too loud, this may lead to a great deal of good. I wonder if he has tact enough to see that."

He had quite as much tact as Arthur in his way. He once, in a natural manner, when the conversation led easily up to the point, mentioned Algernon's noble behaviour to him in a manly straightforward way, and left the leaven to work.

"It'll end in a legacy, mayhap; but, as for that, the Squire's is a better life than Algernon's. I'll do all I can; but time is the word, and caution. That old Princess! I wish she was choked with her diamonds, or smothered in one of her satin gownds, or hung in her own Vallanceens. I'd give a ten pun' note, my lady, to know what games you have been up to in foreign parts in your time, and why you are everlastingly bobbing up and down to Kriegsthurms in a black veil. There's a nail loose in one of your shoes, or you wouldn't be hand in glove with the most pig-eyed, false-hearted, ten-languaged" (Mr. Betts distrusted, with a true British distrust, those who spoke foreign tongues) "rascal in Europe. I could buy your secret of him, my lady, if I was rich enough; but where would be the use of sporting my shillings against your pounds? Old Frankypanny knows all about you, too, but he is such a stuck-up, honourable, poverty-struck old swell that I as much dare ask the Duke of Norfolk. There's old Miss Raylock, too; I was present when she was in the library, rummaging among the old books according to custom; and she was talking as pleasant to me as need be, and as confidential; but when you came in, rustling with your silks, she shut up, did the old girl, all in a minute, as tight as a Chubb's safe, and begins a bowing and scraping, and sticking her old nose in the air; aye, and looked the princess all over, as well as you, and better too. *She* knows. But she is no good. One of the same sort as Frankypanny. That Boginsky, he is a regular young sieve; he'd be the fellow to work, but I never did trepan a loose-mouthed man, except in the way of business, and I never will. Nevertheless, my fine Madam, I am deeply indebted to you for your well-meant effort to hoist me out of this; and if I can put a spoke in your wheel, you may rely on my doing so with a thorough good will."

For the Princess strongly objected to the introduction of Mr. Betts

at Silcotes. Among her better reasons for this, one can see that she distrusted him because he belonged strongly to the faction of the dispossessed prince Algernon; and it was possible, with such a whimsical man as her brother, that his old dislike of Algernon might die out under new influence, to the terrible detriment of her darling Tom, now become a pest and an expensive nuisance to his father. Arthur, in case of being heir, would deal nobly by his brother: from the wronged Algernon Tom could not hope much, she argued, not knowing that the Quixotic Algernon, in his blind devotion to Tom, would have most likely given him back nearly everything, or, at least, would have trusted him with far more than would the shrewder Arthur. Among the more ignoble motives for her dislike of Mr. Betts was the fact that Mr. Betts, having done a vast deal of foreign business in his life among shaky Continental bonds, was intimate with a great many very shaky Continental characters, and chiefly with Kriegsthum, whose close acquaintance with the chances of foreign revolutions had made him a most useful man in old times, and whose information he had paid for handsomely. She knew that Betts and Kriegsthum were intimate, and, with her usual foolishness, asked her brother if he was aware of the sort of character he was bringing into his house; giving an account of Betts's bankruptcy, with a great many fresh particulars, invented, I fear, on the spot. Silcote had told her that he was quite aware of Mr. Betts's bankruptcy, but that he liked the man. He said it so very quietly, that she saw at once that she had only, by being too quick and eager, aroused the old obstinacy in him, and gave up her point directly: becoming at once intensely civil and polite to Mr. Betts.

A woman who shifted her tactics in the most transparent manner on the smallest occasion, a woman who in details never knew her mind for two days together, and yet who, with regard to a few great objects, which her weak brain was capable of understanding, could show a persistency to which the stupid narrow obstinacy of her brother was as nothing! Some person remarking once to Miss Raylock that they wondered how such a very decided person as the Squire could have such a very weak and silly sister, that shrewd old lady remarked, "You little know her. She is a thousand times more Silcote than Silcote himself. She is the greatest living impersonation of Silcotism, which has found its latest development in that, to me, dreadful young gentleman Arthur. You may prevent her having her own way, but it will take two or three of the best of you to do it. And she is not a bad woman at bottom."

From this time one of the leading purposes of the Princess's life

was the elimination of Betts. She did not exactly know why, or even settle with herself whether or no it was better to make a friend of him. She knew what she wanted done, and Betts was in the way of doing it. Betts was a cleverer person than herself, and she was afraid of negotiation on that ground. He must be removed. She had only her old set of weapons to fight with—misrepresentation, patience, and affectionate politeness towards the victim. Betts knew her object, and understood her artifices, and she was perfectly aware that he did so: but she knew, better than twenty Bettses, the power of everlasting affectionate civility: it lulls the most hard, bitter man to sleep some time or another, particularly when it is administered by a princess. The victim is sure to become confidential sooner or later, and commit himself. Her instincts in this respect were better than Betts's shrewdness: but, unfortunately for her, Betts had nothing in reserve about his previous life with the exception of his bankruptcy, of which all the world knew. She, on the other hand, felt perfectly certain that a man who was on the best terms with her beloved Kriegsthurm must have some fact in his biography in reserve; which fact could be bought from Kriegsthurm for a consideration, and made useful. And Kriegsthurm was a great silent ox of a fellow, who was not to be suddenly or spasmodically moved without a large outlay: and Tom was very expensive to her now that his father had pitched him overboard; and so all outward and visible action against Betts was given up for a while.

In a short time Betts saw this; he kept his eyes on her very closely until he saw that she was passive, and then, knowing all the time that she was the key to all the cross purposes in the house, he began his work. He neither saw end or object at first; he only saw that the Dark Squire (whom he found to be not such a bad fellow after all) had been abused, and he guessed that the Princess was at the bottom of it all. The first thing to do was evidently to gain an influence over the Squire, and that was not very difficult.

What the whole Silcote family are plagued with appears to be a kind of moral ossification of the brain. Some time in his earthly career each member of this family seems to get an idea into his head, which never can be got out again without severe worldly affliction, and the patient efforts of all the well-meaning friends of the family. And a noticeable thing is, that obstinate families of this kind have so many friends. The most foolish obstinacy among us does beget some respect. Silcote himself, in spite of his brutal rudeness, was most highly respected and feared in the county. Arthur was respected at Oxford. Algernon, when he

began to develop the family failing, was respected even by the Protestant party in the parish : even Miss Raylock respected the Princess, though she declined to acknowledge it. But we have to do with Silcote himself now. His particular form of the family failing had led to his shutting himself out of all society, until he began, as a shrewd man, to see that he was falling behindhand with the world. To him appeared Betts, keen, cunning, and wise in the ways of the world from which the Squire had dissociated himself so long. Is it any wonder that Betts's influence over him very soon became almost equal to that of Arthur ?

"I want to see the right done here," Betts said to himself ; "but it is all so wrong, that I don't see my way to the right. The Squire is not wise, but that is a family failing. However, here are twelve or fourteen thousand a year to be manœuvred, right way or wrong way, and it is a precious sight better fun working other folks' money than your own.—Ah ! there you are, my good friend Squire Silcote, coming over the lawn to consult me about buying those Welsh bullocks, knowing perfectly well that I know no more about bullocks than I do about church decorations. If I was a fool I should pretend to know something about them, but as I ain't a fool, I shall chaff you about coming to a stockbroker for agricultural information. All you Silcotes want a dry nurse to take care of you ; only she mustn't be particular about having her shins kicked, or her nose bit off."

"Mr. Betts," said the Squire, "would you mind coming down to the green, and looking at some Welsh bullocks for me ?"

"I've no objection to look at your bullocks, Squire, only bargaining that you should tell me which is the head and which is the tail."

"I wanted your advice with regard to buying them."

"When was the bailiff took ill, then ?"

"He is not ill."

"Then why don't you ask him about the bullocks ? He knows a deal better about them than a stockbroker. You ask too much advice, Squire ; and, what is more, take too little."

CHAPTER XXI.

JAMES HAS A WET WALK.

“STAND there,” said Dora, “and I will show you how it all was. You are not quite in the right place yet. You must stand close to the fire, with your hands spread out, blinking your eyes. There, that is just exactly the way you stood on the very first night in that very same place, with all the dogs round you, and your face all bleeding and bruised, and your dirty little cap in your hand, and your dirty little smock-frock all over mud; and you looked such a poor little mite of a thing that I cried about you when I went upstairs, and was peevish with Anne because she wanted to go on with the silly play about Esquimaux.”

James Sugden stood for a few minutes looking into the fire, without answering. He had grown to be a very handsome up-standing young fellow indeed; with more than the usual share of physical beauty, and a remarkably clear resolute pair of eyes. There was also a dextrous rapid grace about all his movements, not generably observable in sixth form hobbledchey youths. He still wore the uniform of St. Mary's, and was in age about seventeen.

For the first time he had been invited by the Squire to spend his Midsummer vacation at Silcotes, and join Algernon's children in their yearly holidays at their grandfather's grand house. He had hitherto spent all his vacations since the removal of the school in Lancaster Square; and the summer vacation had been very dull to him; for Dora and Reginald, with the younger ones, had always been at Silcotes. He had been condemned to drag on the burning long summer days alone with Algernon and Miss Lee, and had always longed intensely for the time to come to return to school. This year, however, Mr. Betts had written to him to say that he was to render himself at Silcotes by five o'clock on the twentieth of June without fail. So, committing his box to an intricate system of cross country carriers—each of whom was supposed to meet the other without fail at obscure villages, and remember a vast number of obscure directions—he had said good-bye to his old friend, Ben Berry, the porter, and, taking only an ordnance map and his sketch-book, had started from St. Mary's by the Lake early in the summer's morning, with his face set straight towards Silcotes. “Only two half-counties to walk through, before the afternoon, my Ben,” he said on starting. “Not much that, hey! Not so bad as the journey down here.”

A resolute young fellow enough. A Silcote could not have been more resolute. The glory of the day waned as he walked stoutly on, until he saw his familiar old Boisey in the hazy dim distance at noon. The distance was very hazy, and the air was very close and hot, yet he held on through a country utterly strange to him, choosing always, by that geographical genius which one sees in some men, but not in very many, the roads which would suit his purpose, and end somewhere ; in preference to those, apparently as much traffic-worn as the others, which only delude one by leading to the parsonage house and the church. The course was north-east, and the great Alps of thunder-cloud, creeping up through the brown haze, had met him and were overhead when, having crossed the infant Loddon at Wildmoor, and having delayed to pick, for Dora, a nosegay of the beautiful geums and orchises, which to him, coming from the heath-country, seemed so rare and so rich, he turned into the deep clay lanes towards the heath.

By this time every one was getting to shelter, and the thunder was loud. The landlord of a little roadside inn he passed urged him to stay, and not go aloft on the desolate open heath, where a man had been killed by the lightning not long before. But weather mattered little to the shepherd lad, and he pleasantly declined, saying, that "he had not time." The landlord looked curiously and admiringly after the swift-footed pleasant-looking young gentleman as he sprang up the steep ascent towards the thunder ; but James never paused, although the storm came down fiercely now, and Boisey was hidden from him completely. In Bramshill Park, the lightning was leaping and blazing all around him, lighting up the dense cloud of rain in every direction, and once, with a snap and a roar it shone in blue and white reflections from every window in the whole of the vast façade of the house, showing him that he was close to shelter. But the humour was on him now ; he would walk on, though not altogether recklessly ; the storm had settled down on the park, and was tearing and riving at that most beautiful spot, till it had exhausted its fury ; even in his headlong humour he knew this, and kept away, as far as possible, from the trees. Before he had been long in the park he had received his caution on this head : a great oak loomed on him out of the rain, and he suddenly saw a bright spark in one of the forks of it ; and before he could put his arm over his head, eight centuries' growth of timber was scattered around him among the fern and the heather. Yet, though he saw the figures of men about the stables beckoning him to stay for shelter, he held on. He had set it in his mind to be at Silcotes by five o'clock, and he held to his resolution with steady good-humoured tenacity.

The next village and street was a stream of water as he passed through it ; no soul was out of doors ; and, as they saw him pass, they wondered whether he was penniless or desperate to walk in such weather. Had some of them known that he was bound for Silcotes, they would not have wondered at all : it would have merely been Hamlet going to England. By the time he had passed Bear Wood, he had succeeded in walking down the storm, and Boisey was close before him in the sunlight of a very practical and quiet summer's afternoon. The reckless fit passed when he found himself in decent and ordinary weather, and he began to bethink himself how he should look at his journey's end, and what the Squire would say of him in his present very untidy condition.

The uniform of St. Mary's, carefully developed by the theoretically-minded Arthur, and the really practically-minded Mr. Betts, was as well calculated to recover from the effects of weather as that of a French soldier. Yet, in his intense eagerness to see some bit of the old country again, to be again within the range of his earlier experiences, he begrudged even the time it took to dry his clothes, which he did at a riverside inn. He now got into the old country at last, and changed his pace suddenly ; for, anxious as he was to get to the Silcotes' country, he was anything but anxious to meet the Squire.

He had come so fast, that even the drying of his clothes and the dawdling along by old familiar paths did not make him late. Every hedgerow was familiar to him, and such an incident as the mending of a stile, or the filling up of some time-honoured gap, was of strange importance, and tempted him to delay ; but, nevertheless, as the turret clock struck five, he peeped through the open door into the dark and empty hall.

Empty but for one figure. Silcote himself was seated before a wood fire in the great cavernous fireplace, and which was never without fire, summer or winter. Hearing a footstep on the threshold, the Squire rose, turned, and looked steadily at him for one moment.

He was not changed. There was the same sturdy, strong figure, and the same grizzled hair, so familiar to James from his childhood. It was the same old "Dark" Squire who advanced towards the young man as he stood, hesitating and modest, in the porch ; but there was a look about that Squire which James had never seen before in his cursory observations of his face. Something had gone very wrong with the Squire this morning. Things generally did go wrong with him, but the effect generally was mere petulance and ill-temper. On this occasion the Squire

came forward with his head bowed down, and an expression of grief and terror on his face. James thought he was coming to speak to him ; but, to his great astonishment and alarm, Silcote passed him steadily, waving him on one side with his hand, and then stood in the porch beside him, but looking away from him, and said,—

“It is of no use. I will not recall what I have done. You have had chance after chance, and you have turned persistently to evil. Even if God pleases to deal with me as heavily as He threatens, it will not benefit you. When all is done, I may fall back on another beside you. You have no right here ; this is one of the innumerable theatrical follies of my sister. You have had my answer once, and, even in this deep affliction, I have all my own obstinacy about me. The house is at your disposal, but I am not accessible. The Princess and you have arranged this between you. Pray carry out your arrangements in my house to the utmost. I wash my hands of the whole matter. I only caution you of the extreme danger of your presence here, and assure you that I will do nothing whatever to stay the course of justice.”

It was evident to James that the Squire had driven himself mad at last, as his mother always said he would. Thinking it best on the whole, however, to justify himself, even to a madman, he turned to Silcote, as he was passing on, and said humbly enough,—

“I beg your pardon, sir, but it was by your own orders that I came here.”

Silcote turned, and looked on him again. At first he was confused for a moment, but recovered himself very quickly. “My boy,” he said, “you must be young Sugden. To be sure. You were to be here by five, and are punctual. That is good. I have had afflictions, my boy,” he continued, drawing near to him, attracted by his bright, honest look, and evidently glad to explain himself to any one. “I have had great afflictions through all my life, and the heaviest has come this morning. They confuse me at times, these afflictions of mine, and I took you for my son Thomas ; you are like what he was. Be a good son to your mother, boy, for she is a good woman. God is hard on bad sons and bad fathers ; the Syrians were right there. As for you, I hear nothing but good of you ; all kinds of good from every one. You will die young, but that is no matter ; the good ones always die young,—Cleobis, you know. Make yourself happy here : hear but a word in private. Hold your tongue about what you have heard me say just now. Let it be a secret between us, boy. Dora is in there ; go in and find her. Don’t fall in love with Anne, mind ;

she is too much of a Silcote : choose Dora. Go in and keep our secret. Not a word to any soul, or it will come round to Arthur at last : he gets hold of all our secrets in time."

James felt a little more dazed than he was in the height of the thunderstorm in Bramshill Park. Here was a curious reception after a curious headlong journey. The first average and commonplace incident which befell him during that somewhat remarkable day was his meeting with Dora in the hall. She was commonplace enough, as she always was, for she at once made him stand before the smouldering fire, and spoke to him the words which stand at the beginning of this very chapter.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MAN IN THE MACKINTOSH.

"AND I," said Dora, "consider that you have improved since that time, immensely, both physically and morally. Other people, as for instance my aunt, may hold the opinion that you are in danger of becoming a very shallow young spark. Miss Lee, whose opinions, more particularly when directed and inspired by my uncle Arthur, I am bound to respect, may be of opinion that we are both getting too old to continue our former intimacy. I am not here, however, to combat other people's opinions, so much as to express my own. And to tell you the honest and plain truth, James Sugden, I have watched you pretty closely for some years, and I think you will do."

"And you will do in time," said James ; "that is, if you will think before you speak, and when you have made a mistake think again and mend it. Which you don't do now, you know. There, that is flippant enough to suit the Princess. Now, let us be comfortable. How are you, and what's the news ?"

"I am very well, and I may have some news, or I may not."

"I have had an astonishment, to-day," said James.

"So have I."

"Are you going to trump my trick, as usual ?" said James.

Said Dora, "I can't tell till you have played your card."

And then James remembered that he was bound by all rules of honour not to say a word of what had passed between him

and the Squire, and so he told her that he could not play his trump.

"Then any small card will do for the trick," said Dora. "I have been utterly astonished at the size and colouring of my grandfather's quilled German asters. Now."

"There is something more than that, Dora, I know."

"I suppose you do, unless you are a goose; but, if we are to play the great game of astonishment, you shall not hold the trumps in your hand."

"I can't play my trump, Dora. I can't tell you what I have heard in the last twenty minutes. Answer me this. Is there anything wrong in the house?"

"You give up the game?"

"Entirely."

"Well, then, I will tell you; and I am very glad we are alone together. I fear there is something very wrong indeed. There has been a long interview between Arthur and his father in the library. Uncle Arthur came out first, looking as pale as a ghost, a deal more like death than life, James, I assure you; and, after a time, grandpapa came out crying,—ay, he did, and sat there before the fire with his head in his hands for I don't know how long."

"Why, I saw him sitting so myself," said James.

"Did you?" said Dora. "Well, that is an important and valuable fact, supposing any one had the audacity to question my statement. At present we can keep it in reserve. The question is, what is the matter?"

"I wonder what it is," said James.

"I suppose you do, unless you have determined to give up wondering for the rest of your life. I wonder. Any gaby can wonder."

"After all, you know," replied James, "you haven't any right to wonder, because it is no possible business of yours. And you have no right to catch me up so short. I dare say you think that sort of thing very fine, but I don't. I don't approve of it. You are fond of doing it to me when we are alone, but you know you never dare do it before company, for fear of my picking you up. I thought you were going to be comfortable. If this is what you mean, you had better be uncomfortable."

"I *am* uncomfortable," said poor Dora, stamping her foot, and beginning to cry. "I meant to be so nice to you, and I am so very fond of you——"

As this is an eminently unsentimental story, I will omit what

passed before James and Dora were standing looking out of the window together, perfectly "comfortable." "Paul and Virginia" is not out of print, surely, though I have not seen it lately.

But though Dora was "comfortable" enough with James, she was far from being good company; at least to any one but him. Everything was going wrong, it appeared, at Lancaster Square (she *said* that things in general were all mops and brooms, an expression which we are forced to trace to Miss Lee in her earlier form of development); grandpa Betts was always here now (meaning at Silcotes); and poor pa had not a sound head left in the house to guide him except hers. There was only one pupil left now, young Dempster, who had only stayed on to propose to her, and had got *his* answer. There were no new pupils coming. The weekly bills were all in arrear, and likely to be, for her father had declared for ritualism, and the pews would all of them be empty in three months. It was a sudden resolution. He had been brooding over the matter for a long time; but after his recent visit to Oxford he had decided, and declared that nothing would move him now. If grandpa Betts had been by his side, he could have made the thing more palatable to the parishioners; he always warned pa to let them down to it very easy; but then he was here, concocting business of some sort with grandpa Silcote, and so what was the use of talking. Algernon's health was worse than ever, and he had to swallow a king's ransom in cardanums and gentian, and, though the doctor might wait for his money, the grocer certainly would not. Then she passed to Miss Lee. Passed to Miss Lee, and stopped. "I cannot speak of her. If I dared tell her that she was neglecting the duties nearest to her, she would only say that she is fulfilling higher ones. I wish she could find time for both. But she can't, and she is a good woman. Believe in Miss Lee; will you, James?"

"The last saint in the calendar; certainly," said the public school-boy. "About the Princess, for instance. From a great variety of hints I have received—or, to be perfectly truthful, from a vast number of conversations I have heard, as an unappreciated and unnoticed fourth party in your father's house, between your father, Arthur, and the banished prince Thomas—I have formed the conclusion that she is at the bottom of every piece of mischief which happens in this house. How does she stand affected in the present instance? Here we have all things going wrong, both at my old home in Lancaster Square and at this new home here at Silcotes. A woman is at the bottom of it you know. Tell me about *her* movements, and I will form my judgment."

"Vanity Fair, Vanity Fair," replied Dora at once; "you are

talking Vanity Fair, my lord. The book that makes every school-boy who has read it believe that he is a man of the world. Bless you, *I* read that book, and thought it was the key to the world. But Miss Lee and Aunt Mary have cured me of that. Don't talk Vanity Fair. Be a boy."

"And don't you give me your father's remarks on that book at second-hand. Come now."

"I think we had better have no more of this crude babble," said Dora.

"And there spoke your uncle Arthur," said James.

"Well, here come Reginald and Anne," said Dora. "My dear James, we shall never do Beatrix and Benedict. We have not the art. Let us be friends."

There entered now a pale, delicate, but very amiable-looking boy, a boy say seventeen, and with him a very beautiful girl, of nearly the same age. The pair were indescribable, simply because there was nothing to describe as yet.

They were merely a well-looking enough boy and girl, but in no degree remarkable as yet in outward appearance. To the shrewder, and younger, or rather more slowly-developed pair who watched their entrance, there was something observable: they had been quarrelling, and were not on speaking terms with one another. James and Dora "sparred" continually, but never quarrelled. Reginald and Anne, who always paired off together, seldom or never "sparred," but spent their time between strongly ostentatious bursts of affection and long periods of sulks. They were sulking at one another now, in a more than ordinary way; and Dora was so fully aware of this fact, and followed her kindly instinct so far, as to go across to James, lightly pass her hand over his hair, and lay her hand on his shoulder. James, in the most accidental manner, managed to turn his head and touch that hand unseen, and so was enlisted on the side of the peace-maker.

"I have come through such an awful storm," he said, as soon as the usual greetings were given and exchanged, though without moving, for fear of Dora's hand going from his shoulder. "Thunder, and lightning, and rain, beyond belief. But I had some one to see at the journey's end, and I never flinched, Dora."

"You were afraid of grandpa's being angry if you were after your time, and you were more afraid of him than of the thunder."

"Well, there is something in that," said James, throwing back his head, and looking up in her face laughing, "though it may

not have been pretty to say so. I knew there was a Silcote, male or female, young or old, at the end of the journey; and that I was pretty sure to get my nose snapped off somehow. Reggy, old man, it was lucky for you that you came on two days before me, you would have got drenched. There has been no storm here."

There seems to be an Avenger who waits on the heels of good-natured people who try to solve (in a chemical sense), or water away, a quarrel by commonplace. When I say an Avenger, I don't in the least mean your Nemesis. Your Nemesis acts on settled law, principle, and logic, through long periods of time; sometimes so long, that a matter of exactly eight centuries will go by without a sign of her. She belongs to the atmosphere of tragedy, with which we have nothing to do. The ordinary Social Avenger holds the same relation to her as Mrs. Sherwood's Inbred Sin (the only agreeable character in the "Infant Pilgrims") holds to Milton's Satan. Your Nemesis is deliberative and inexorably just; your Avenger is sudden and eminently unjust; acting, for instance, in this case, only on the very vague basis that you have no business to talk commonplace on any grounds whatever. The avenger came swiftly down on James, and gave it to him. The thunder-storm was the very point on which Reginald and Anne had been quarrelling.

"I am glad to find myself confirmed," said Anne, from the window in which she was sulking. "There has been no thunder-storm here; and there will be none. And he has hurried me home here, from where we were comfortably by the river, watching the fish, because he said there would be thunder directly. He would not have his health if he did not have his own way."

A tremendous crash of thunder among the beechwoods close by only made matters worse. Reginald was right, which was profoundly exasperating; and, what was more, took every opportunity of reminding her of it, in the pause between each blaze of lightning and each rattle of thunder, till his voice sounded like a response in some terrible litany. The quarrel was not mended that night.

But the hours, and the bells which announced the hours, were as inexorable at Silcotes as at any Trappist monastery. In spite of a wild imbroglio of weather outside, the dressing-bell rang its defiance to the thunder, and they went to dress. Then the dinner-bell rang, and they came one by one into the blue drawing-room, bluer than ever with the continual flashes of lightning; and were marshalled solemnly by the butler into the long oak dining-room

where these young people were set solemnly down to their soup, in a thunderstorm, with a butler in black, and four footmen in crimson plush breeches to wait on them.

Ridiculous enough! The youngest footman was the most intimate and bosom friend of James in the old days, and James was dying to compare notes with him: but there was an awful gulf between them now. They had been school-mates, and had been shepherd-boys for neighbouring farmers, and many times had surreptitiously driven their sheep close together at the risk of their mixing, at the risk of a terrible beating, that they might while away together some few of the hours of a winter's day by the interchange of such human thought as was working in their dull little brains. But the tall young footman took no notice of the handsome young scholar, beyond insisting, in spite of a martinet butler, on waiting on him, and on him solely, and plying him with every kind of sauce, the wine not as yet being within his jurisdiction.

In the midst of this very awful dinner, the Princess, now seen for the first time, swept in solemnly, and took her place at the head of the table. It had pleased her, for purposes of her own, to dress herself like Mary Queen of Scots, and she sat there and presided at the table, with her jewels and lace lit up every moment by the lightning, looking as theatrical as she could possibly have wished herself. In general she was very cheerful and playful with the children, but something had happened in the house that morning, and she was determined to make the most of it. She greeted them all courteously, but scarcely spoke, and left them again as soon as the dessert was on the table. Of the Squire or of Arthur there was no sign.

The young people got free soon after this, and James's first movement was to catch his quondam friend, the youngest footman. Time was short, as it might please the Squire to come down for coffee, and he dreaded offending him. "George, old fellow!" he said, catching him in a passage, "what is wrong in the house? Do tell me."

"It's Mr. Arthur," said the young man hurriedly. "He has been having fits, and kept it to himself. But he can't live three months. That is what is the matter."

The storm swept by, and left a steady down-pouring rain. Reginald and Anne had gone away to different parts of the house, with their childish quarrel still festering between them, and Dora and James sat together before the wood fire in the great hall, alone and almost silent, complacent in one another's company, comparing notes and exchanging opinions on the past and future.

The whole of the house was nearly silent ; there was only to be heard the whisper of the now distant thunder, and in distant offices the deadened sounds of the great domestic life which it pleased the Squire, in his useless ostentation, to keep around him. A footman had come in, and brought a tray with wine and water. The butler had come in a long time after, and, having looked around him, had disappeared again like a black respectable ghost, who wished to assure himself that the other ghosts in that great hall were conducting themselves properly, and not annoying his master's guests before the proper hour of night. James had not told Dora anything about her uncle Arthur ; and they had arranged to be "comfortable" together, and were carrying out their intention, with the example of Reginald and Anne before them, by saying the first thing which came into either of their heads, and not contradicting one another (which is the true base of the art of conversation) when night suddenly became hideous. I think, when we were first introduced to the Silcote *ménage* there were about a dozen bloodhounds. Since then the breed had become valuable, and Mr. George had paid considerable sums of money for several of them. The Squire never objected to the turning of an honest penny, and had kept up the breed, so that there now were some twenty of them, and they all began barking and baying at once.

James and Dora had hardly time to say, "Somebody coming," when a step was heard at the hall-door, close opposite to them, and the man who trod that footstep, whether frightened by the horrible noise of the dogs, which he had every reason to believe loose, or anxious to get out of the rain, or unable to find the bell, began rattling at the door with all his might. James, with a certain terror of the dogs in his own mind, solved the difficulty by walking across the hall and letting him in.

The man he admitted at once walked half-way across the hall before he spoke. Then turning to James he said, "Young gentleman, I guess from your uniform that you are in the navy. Sea-going is notoriously good for the nerves, as Trafalgar shows. But even at Trafalgar there was no talk of Lord Nelson being eaten alive by bull terriers. Consequently I hope you and this young lady will excuse my abrupt entrance. I wish you a good evening, miss, and all good fortune."

He was a lean, sallow, black-whiskered man of a doubtful age. He stood before them dressed in mackintosh, dripping, and they wondered with a very great wonder who he could be.

"You need not be afraid of the dogs, sir," said James ; "Mr. Silcote generally keeps them tied up. And there has been no

accident with them for above a week. Did you want Mr. Silcote ? ”

“ No,” said the man in mackintosh ; “ unless I am mistaken, I want to speak with this young lady by the fire. Miss Lee, I believe ? ”

“ No,” said Dora, rising ; “ I am not Miss Lee. I am Miss Silcote. Miss Lee is my governess.”

“ Is not Miss Lee here, then, miss ? ”

“ No,” said Dora ; “ she is not here. She is at my father’s house in Lancaster Square.”

The man in mackintosh actually swore in the presence of Dora, but apologised for it immediately afterwards. “ That is your private inquiry office business, miss, all over. They can’t be employed to trace Miss Lee for us, but what they must trace her forty mile too far, and put our people to ten pounds extra expense, if that mattered.—By the by,” he added, turning to James, “ now we are on the spot it may be worth while. Do you know these parts, sir ? ”

“ Pretty well,” said James.

“ What is the name of that village I came through just now, outside the park gates ? ”

“ Beechwood,” said James.

“ You don’t know the name of Sugden in connexion with these parts, do you ? ” said he in the mackintosh.

“ My name is Sugden,” said James ; “ and I was born and bred there.”

“ Thank you,” said the stranger ; “ and Miss Lee, you say, miss, has not come to spend her holiday here with your grandpa, but is at Lancaster Square ? Thank you very much, miss. I am sure I hope you will excuse the mistake of addressing a young lady as the young lady’s governess, but Miss Lee was described to me as being of remarkable personal attractions, and so the mistake was perfectly natural. Mr. Sugden, if you are not too nervous to see me out of the avenue, or if any of Mr. Silcote’s people had such a thing as a lantern, I should feel more comfortable about getting back to my fly at the lodge. The driver remarked that the Squire objected to hired vehicles in his grounds, and, on remonstrance, said he would see *himself* further before he’d go a yard further. You will go with me there ? Thank you.”

James went with him to the lodge. The man was profoundly respectful to him during their short walk, and, on getting into his fly, said,—

“ Present instructions are binding, sir. I am not going beyond

them when I ask you to present my respectful compliments to your mother. George Thompson is the name, sir. I wish you a very good night."

And so he drove off. And James, returning, found that Dora was gone to bed, and that the only occupant of the hall was the Princess of Castelnuovo, as Mary Queen of Scots, who was standing before the fire with a bedroom candlestick, in an attitude.

"There has been a man here, boy?" she demanded of him.

"Yes, my lady."

"German?"

"No, my lady."

"Italian, then? Do not prevaricate."

"I am not prevaricating, my lady. The man was an Englishman."

CHAPTER XXIII.

ARTHUR GOES TO TEA WITH MISS RAYLOCK.

THERE lived in the village near Silcotes two people called Mr. and Mrs. Jones, in no way remarkable, except that they knew every one about that part of the country; and every one considered them to be so amiable, so inoffensive, and so insignificant, that they found themselves, some three times a week, the repositories of the most important secrets; sometimes, I regret to say, of actionable libels.

And they didn't know why, and no one could tell them. The great fact remains, however,—an undisturbed good, and undeniable fact. Everybody told them everything.

Sometimes, at first, one used to think that the reason of their being such general confidants was that they were a safe couple, and held their tongues. One might go as far as to say that separately, and at certain times, they *did* hold their tongues, and you got to trust them. But afterwards, when they were both together even, you found that you could get anything out of them you liked. Taken apart, one soon found they were a pair of sieves, and wondered much why they should be elected as the confidants of the neighbourhood. You came to the conclusion that they were not so chosen for their reticence, but for the opposite quality. You have many things which you would wish to reach your neighbours' ears, and yet which you would not like to

say first-hand. One began to see, after a time, that the Joneses were not so much confidants, as vehicles.

A certain now eminent man was once roundly abused in a common-room, in which he was not present, by a certain theologian. The mutual friend, the vehicle, brought the intelligence to him, then a struggling man. He had one weapon, and he used it; he had the mutual communicative friend. "He is a ruffian, and drinks!" said he to the mutual friend, knowing that it would be carried faithfully. The knife went between the old theologian's ribs deeper than if the stab had been made first-hand. The retort was false, though not falser than the attack; but it hit deeper. Mr. and Mrs. Jones were often used in this way.

They were, at all events, on the very best terms with every one. They were on the most intimate terms with Miss Raylock, and that very good old lady was by no means averse to an innocent accumulation of facts about her neighbours: had not mankind, with its virtues, its foibles, its ways of action, been the study of her life? Was she to lose all interest in her neighbours because she had left off writing uncommonly smart and unmistakeable sketches of them? Not at all. Why, Squire Silcote himself stood as hero in her novel of "Cleverness and Credulity." And she naturally was most anxious to see whether or no her guess as to his future would come true. She was in the habit also of declaring humorously among friends that, if she were younger, she would write another novel and call it "Priggery and Pugnacity," the hero of which should be young Arthur Silcote; for she could not bear that young gentleman at all. She was, in short, a nice old lady, one-half of a good gossip herself. She could listen admirably, and in a tentative way; making you talk about your neighbours until she knew what she wanted; and then changing the conversation by a little prudish advice about the evil of talking about your neighbours' affairs. As for getting one word out of her, except what she chose to speak deliberately, that was perfectly hopeless. The other half of the qualities of a really good gossip, a sieve-like incontinence of speech, was wanting in her. She was, therefore, a very intimate acquaintance of the Joneses, who, however, never gratified their curiosity about the Princess, for example, much as they desired it. When they had laid their treasures of hearsay at Miss Raylock's feet, they had only to make the slightest inquiry as to the antecedents of that sainted Princess to make Miss Raylock bridle, and say that they had been talking quite enough about other folks' affairs, and begin talking of agriculture or geology.

She was a perfect old empress in her way. She considered that

an invitation to tea with her was of quite as much importance, as great a compliment, as one of those dreadful invitations to Compiègne. The Joneses, who were mildly literary, rich, and very agreeable, were in the habit of "having down" literary men, artists, theatrical people, sometimes also people concerned in the government of the country, noble or other. The Joneses had champagne, pictures, rare books, carriages and horses, flowers, and India-rubber opinions of the most advanced order, suited for all guests, and expressed in the most advanced language; in short, everything which can make life worth having. But the great treat which they proposed to all their guests—from the Rev. Mr. A. (U. S.), the Baptist missionary of Nevada, to Mr. Z. the ultra-Anglican ceremonialist; from Mr. Dawkins, the man who considered Mr. Bright a half-hearted man, too cautious and compromising, to Mr. Hawkins, the Tory Essex agriculturist—the treat proposed to all these people was the same. They schemed and fished for an invitation to tea with Miss Raylock. A. and Z., Dawkins and Hawkins,—it was all the same. They believed in Miss Raylock, and these people *must* come to tea with her. If they had never heard of her, that was their ignorance; if they had never read her books, that was their neglect; if they had read them, and did not like them, that was their want of taste. But they must not be allowed to suppose that, because one lived in the provinces, one was getting in the rear of thought. Miss Raylock was the only visible intellectual phenomenon in those parts; and the high honour of going to tea with her was a sacred one.

So these two honest toadies of the good old woman made a queen of her, and kept her to the belief that such honest and good thought as she had uttered in her day, and with some purpose, was still current under *her* stamp. In the main she was right. The truth she had told was recognised truth still, but it had been handled by fifty hands since, some coarser, some finer than hers. The most ever said about her in the world was now and then by some critic of fiction, who had read her books; and the most that such a man ever said was: "Why old Miss Raylock said the very same thing five-and-twenty years ago." The old lady knew nothing of all this. She had once been a queen, and she considered herself a queen still. And her peremptory refusal to admit Dawkins, the Radical and Atheist (as she called him), into her house, is still preserved among the archives of the Jones family. They have a profound respect and fear for the old lady, which does in a way both themselves and the old lady credit. A shrewd tongue is a great possession. I doubt whether Mrs. Jones had a prouder moment in her life than when she broke gently to

the great Dawkins, the headlong democrat, the fact that Mrs. Raylock couldn't make her principles coincide with asking him to tea ! Dawkins was not amused, because he was not in possession of facts, and had never in his life heard of Miss Raylock. But the triumph was great for Mrs. Jones. "You are a great and dangerous man, you Dawkins, but here is one greater than you."

There came one day to call on these Joneses, Arthur Silcote, in a rather more pragmatic frame of mind than usual. It was only a day or two after the peremptory rejection of Dawkins, and Mrs. Jones, naturally proud of such a very exclusive acquaintance, such a very celebrated personage, before so famous a scholar as Arthur, mentioned it accidentally to him.

"Miss Raylock ?" he said. "And who is Miss Raylock ?"

This was such an astounding and puzzling rejoinder that Mrs. Jones sat perfectly silent, not having made up her mind whether to be indignant or scornful. Arthur saved her the trouble.

"Oh, Miss Raylock," he added quickly ; "I know. She is the funny old trot of a mad woman who lives in the village. Of course I know. How stupid I am."

Mrs. Jones said quietly, "She is not mad, Mr. Silcote. She has known you and yours for many years. I am astonished that you should not remember her. Your memory is getting short."

For one moment, when she said these words, Arthur's eyes twitched and wandered, and a look of deep anxiety came over his deadly pale beautiful face. He was himself again in a moment, and said :—

"Well, a man with his brain worked like mine cannot remember everything. There is no need to tell him that his memory is breaking and his mind going" ("his manners too," thought Mrs. Jones) "because he cannot at a moment remember the name of an old mad woman. I remember her perfectly well now, and I beg your pardon. So she would not have the great Dawkins to tea, eh ? Plucky old lady. I will show her how I appreciate her conduct by going and having tea with her myself this very afternoon."

"Has she asked you ?" said Mrs. Jones.

"Not she. I am going to ask myself."

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," replied Mrs. Jones ; and then more eagerly, "Pray don't do anything so—so—rash !"

"Rude begins with the same letter as rash," said Arthur ; "was that the real word ?"

"Oh dear, no, not at all," replied Mrs. Jones, with as much emphasis as is allowed to a lady in these times. "But I wouldn't go if I were in your place."

“Why not?”

“Because, if I were in your place, I should not think of doing anything of the kind.”

Seeing that Mrs. Jones had retired behind the bulwark of female reiteration—and a terrible strong one it is—Arthur laughed, and departed on his rather rude and self-sufficient errand. He remembered Miss Raylock well enough now, but somehow had got to think she was dead. There are some old people whom we always hesitate to inquire after on our return to our native village. Arthur had been living very fast, I mean intellectually fast, and Miss Raylock had got confused in his mind with some one else. Things *did* get confused to him now sometimes; he *felt* it, though he would not acknowledge it to himself; and it vexed him, and made him angry. He was in one of his later and (may I say it of one who was really a noble person?) more ill-conditioned moods when he rang at Miss Raylock's garden gate.

It was Miss Raylock's love of beauty which, in the first instance, made her write tales at all: it was her intense love of order which made her write them so well. Having retired wisely and nobly, with her prestige untouched, from her task of telling the beauty of order to the world with her pen, she had expressed it to herself and the few friends who came to see her in her house and her garden. People for whom even the Joneses dared not ask an invitation to tea were allowed to see her garden,—a maze of flowers, from the time when the Christmas roses raised their pale heads from the frosty ground, to the time when the last chrysanthemum drooped his bold head before the

“Hungry wind that went wandering about
Like a wolf which has smelt a dead child out.”

Of the exquisite order of her quaint little cottage we need not speak here. It is only the beauty of her garden with which we have to do. This old maid, whose pride it was never to have had a lover, had an intense love for certain forms of beauty. And even in her devotions to her flowers you found, when you came to know her well, that the old feeling in favour of order was stronger than the almost equally strong feeling for ostentatious gaudy colouring. A corcopsis was dearer to her than a prize balsam,—the perfect folding of the old moss-rose, or the Souvenir de Malmaison, dearer to her than the rich barbarity of colour with the inferior and lower form of such a rose as Ophirie.

It was high summer-time on the afternoon of which we speak, and the whole of the garden flamed and blazed with rows and piles

of well-ordered colour. What little green there was was as smooth as a billiard-table ; the gravel, scarcely less smooth than the grass, was guiltless of a leaf or a straw : the whole place was faint with a thousand scents, hot and quiet—one vivid blaze of a brilliant painting, under a bright summer sun ; and in the midst of it all, alone in the sunlight, utterly colourless in face, stood Arthur Silcote, in black from head to foot, a wonderful foil to all the bright colour around him.

There was beauty of a rare kind, and order of a rare kind, in him too,—of a rarer and higher kind than any which could be found in the very best flower in Miss Raylock's garden. But Miss Raylock, after having said to her little maid, "Let him in," could not see it, and said, looking through her drawing-room window, "Aha! my young gentleman! and so *you* are there. I shall begin to believe in the Princess's table-rapping soon!"

Arthur was let in by the door which led into the garden, and took his solitary black figure from among the brilliant flowers and the bright sun into the dark little drawing-room of Miss Raylock. The common or combination room of a college is not the very best place for studying the habits and ways of ladies, but Arthur's nose was by this time sufficiently educated to tell him that he was in the drawing-room of a lady. There was nothing to guide him to any conclusion but his nose ; for, coming out of the brilliant sun, and the more brilliant flowers, his eyes were perfectly useless ; his ears also were of very little use to him, for Miss Raylock stood up perfectly still and silent, eyeing him with intense curiosity, like a cunning little old bird.

"How much do you know, and what is the amount of your influence, my little gentleman?" she said to herself, but remained silent just long enough to give Arthur time to see that he had done a very impertinent thing. Seeing a dim grey figure before him, and feeling that he must go through with his adventure, he of course spoke first.

"I have come to pay you a visit, Miss Raylock."

"You got my invitation to tea, then?" said the old lady ; "that is right."

Arthur felt deeply foolish, but he could not lie in the very least degree under any circumstance whatever. He had therefore to answer, "No."

"That is not wonderful," said the inexorable old lady, "seeing that it was never written. And though I certainly do want to see you, yet I doubt if it would ever have been written. I don't like you, young gentleman, and so I warn you ; shall I tell you why?"

"I don't think we should gain anything by that, Miss Raylock," said Arthur, laughing, and perfectly at his ease. She was using his own weapons, and he was perfectly at home with them. "The reason of my visit here is very simple. I was given to understand that your tea-drinkings were very exclusive businesses, and I determined at once that I would drink tea with you uninvited. I should do the same thing (with different tactics) if I was defied to appear at one of the Duchess of Cheshire's balls."

"That is very neat," said Miss Raylock; "at least, very neat for a Silcote. The Duchess of Cheshire and myself, as leaders of exclusion, would, you imply, be both flattered by having their Olympus scaled by such a giant as yourself."

"That is not quite so neat as my pretty speech, my dear madam; and I think you will find in real life badinage rapidly deteriorates in point after the first few retorts, and the common-room is not a bad school for repartee. Suppose we drop it. The question is, have I earned my tea by my impudence?"

"You have."

"Then ring the bell, if you can see where it is; and let there be peace between us."

He had calculated on her being amused and pleased by his "bumptiousness," and he had reckoned right. Besides, he knew the old lady was fond of celebrities (her "Recollections" prove that), and he was in his way an eminent man. She began to feel friendly towards him, and had no reason to be afraid of him. She confessed to herself that, if her object had been to match her brains against his, she would have felt afraid. Her object only was to speak of certain things and names, and see how they affected him. They were very soon quite comfortable together. She was a shrewd and pleasant talker, in addition to being a wonderfully well-posted woman. Arthur, who at one time that afternoon really had half-forgotten about her, found that she was very pleasant, and that he was enjoying himself. Italy was the subject she chose to stick to, and, the shrewd Arthur believed, because he had never been there, and she wanted to show off. But she showed off very charmingly; so much so, that when she said, "Did you notice my flowers?" he was rather sorry that she had changed the conversation.

"I noticed them, and they are very beautiful. Stay, that is *façon de parler*. They were too gaudy; almost barbarically gaudy."

"You are right," she said. "But, when you are as old as I am, and your eyes get dim, and your bones get cold, you will

pine, as I do, for colours and warmth, even though it be barbaric. These horrible long English winters, without light, without colour, without warmth, make one sigh for the delicious winters of Italy."

And, although the old lady spoke of dimmed eyes and chilled bones, *her* eyes were as bright and as inquisitive as a jackdaw's, and her attitude of intense curiosity spoke of anything but a rheumatic old age. The room perhaps was too dark for Arthur to notice this, and he only said, "I wonder you don't go to Italy, Miss Raylock. You have spent the winter there then?"

"One or two," she said, sitting back in her chair. "One very pleasant one. Let me see. Whom did we have at Florence that year? Let me speak slowly, and remember. There were Pozzo Argentino, and your father, and your aunt the Princess, and Castelnovo: one ought to put the lady before the gentleman, though," and here she watched him intensely; "and their factotum Kriegsthurm, who murdered the postilion,"—(speaking very slow here)—"at least he was proved not to have murdered him; but then, as we all believed he did, it was very charming and romantic to have a man we knew to be an Austrian, and whom we thought to be a murderer, as major-domo; but I am getting below-stairs. We novelists, you know, study all ranks in life from duty. And then we had Symplegadesi, the Greek—a charming person, but, I fear, a sad rogue. How he got his name together I leave to a fellow and tutor of Balliol. And then there were the Hathertons from Boston—most charming specimens of the very best kind of Americans, and the Lennoxes, from New Orleans—equally charming; and, last not least, my dear old friend, Count Frangipanni, the patriot. You know him, of course?"

Arthur did not. She saw that he knew nothing of any of these people except his father and aunt. She went on. There was another name she kept in reserve, and she watched for the effect of it carefully.

"We had a very pleasant winter, I assure you. I suppose it is wrong for English artists, authors, poets and so on, to leave these muddy skies for clearer ones; but they do. Heine twits us with it. Our best poetess is there now, saying all kinds of things about the future of Italy to English ears, when she might be as well employed in singing the wrongs of the agricultural labourers at home. However, I have done the same thing in my time. I had a charming old villa—not at all like Dickens's 'Pink Jail'—and used to receive these people. They are uncomfortable, though, those Italian country-houses, in winter.

There is no preparation for cold. A place like Ufton is worth all of them together in winter. Do you know Ufton ? ”

“ I know it well. I should think that Samuel Reade must have painted ‘ Sprites’ Hall’ or the ‘ Haunted House’ from it.”

“ So I should think,” said Miss Raylock. “ You do know Ufton, do you ? And how, for instance ? ”

“ I am much interested in St. Mary’s College in Hampshire, and that is the nearest great house to it. I know it well—a place of bats and owls ; the most perfect specimen of what they call a Tudor country-house I have ever seen.”

“ How far is it from the college ? ”

“ About six miles.”

“ Do you know that the upholsterers are in it, and that they are doing it up—that the owner is coming back ? ”

“ No. I have heard nothing, and care to know nothing about it. I suppose I shall lose the run of the grounds now.”

“ You at all events know the name of the proprietor, who is coming back from Italy to live there ? ”

“ I can’t say I remember it.”

“ Sir Godfrey Mallory.”

She looked more keenly than ever at him now. He only answered, without any change of feature, “ Hah ! descendant of the man who wrote ‘ Morte D’Arthur,’ I suppose. Is he an old goose ? I’ll make him believe about the ‘ Morte D’Arthur,’ and get the run of the place again.”

“ Then you never heard of him ? ”

“ Never in my life,” said Arthur.

“ He knows nothing,” thought Miss Raylock ; and she began to get impatient. “ Have you any influence over your aunt the Princess ? ” she said.

“ A little. But what degree of influence ? ”

“ Can you prevent her doing a silly thing ? ”

“ No. Can you ? ”

“ I don’t want repartee ; I want sense. Can you prevent her going to Ufton, or going to Italy, or going to Vienna ? Can you prevent your father from maundering and daundering down in his idleness to that foolish college ? There, you are no use whatever ; but can you take a message ? Give Mr. Betts my most respectful compliments, and tell him that I expect him here to tea at five o’clock to-morrow. I have not the honour of his acquaintance, I allow ; but there, I am a lone unprotected woman, and this interview has been scandalously long. If our dear neighbours say anything unpleasant about it, remember on

your honour, that it was of your seeking. Go along with you, Master Oxford, and don't tread on my flower-beds. Send me Betts, will you? Send me Betts."

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN WHICH DORA DISCOVERS A SECRET.

THE beds at Silcotes were more comfortable than the beds of St. Mary's; and, besides, there was no eight o'clock chapel there, and indeed no apology or substitute for anything of the sort. Arthur, in his earlier and more vigorous development, had certainly tried prayers, but habit had been against him, and had beaten even him. Nay, the great English institution of breakfast was in that establishment a mere form so diluted that, when the house was full of such people as still cared to go there for the shooting, it was merely changed, by a little vigorous action on the part of the butler, into lunch. No times were kept in that house before seven o'clock, and then woe be to the man who was late down to dinner, and cared for soup.

I believe that the first thing which an English schoolboy looks forward to, when he comes to you for the holidays, is a regular good lie in bed of a morning. Ask the next young gentleman you have over to spend his vacation with you at what hour he would wish to be called. If I am wrong he will no doubt correct me. And again your sailor fresh from a voyage, or your traveller pressed for time, will confirm the schoolboy as to the great fact that there is nothing like bed of a morning. Charles Lamb again, a man from whom I am informed there is no appeal just now, goes with them, or I should say went with them, and lay abed till he chose to get up.

It was therefore perfectly natural for James to lie long and sleep heavily the morning after the storm, and when he awoke it was with a start, and with his old keen swift look around him, for he felt in his sleep that some one was looking at him, and lo, the Squire himself sitting on the bed, and holding in his hand a large clumsy key.

"Hullo!" cried the Squire, "you can't have much on your

conscience if you sleep like that. I have been staring at you ever so long. I am going out all day, and so I have brought you the key of your old cottage."

"Thank you, sir," said James.

"Yes," said Silcote. "I have kept it locked up ever since she went. I had a great respect for your mother. A downright plain-spoken woman, but a lady, a perfect lady. Do you see much of her now?"

"I have never seen her, sir, since the day she left me at school."

"So she has stuck to her resolution," thought the Squire; "a most remarkable woman! She has taken what I said somewhat too literally.—Do you ever hear from her?"

"Once every year, just merely telling me to be steady, and saying we shall meet some day.

"And where is she, and what is she doing?"

"I have no idea."

"Indeed! was there no postmark on the letter?"

"Only London, sir. I suppose you don't happen to know where they are? I should like to see my father again."

"Very creditable. But I have no idea. A few days after you went to school they came to the steward with their key, carrying heavy bundles. And they walked off eastward, and were lost in a mist, and from that time to this not a word has been heard of them. Do you think you would remember her?"

"I am very doubtful of it, sir. And I fear she would not know me."

Silcote laughed. "Not much fear of that," he said. "But I will go. I have one of my riding fits on, and sha'n't be home before dinner. By the by, if you were to bring your mind to bear on getting up it might be as well, for it is past eleven," and, laying the key on the bed, he went away.

James came thoughtfully down stairs, and found that the breakfast-room was empty, and that the others had all breakfasted and dispersed; there was only one plate laid, and on it a letter addressed to him.

It was in an easy running business hand, with boldy emphatic initial letters and tails. It was as follows:—

"HONOURED SIR,—Thinking that it would save time if you would kindly put me in possession of the address of your mother, Mrs. Sugden, I venture to ask you for it. I go to London by the next train; and so perhaps you will be so good as to telegraph it to my employers, Messrs. Barret and Hall, Lincoln's Inn Fields.

I see now that I was wrong not to have asked you for it last night, when we stood face to face ; but I was a little put out by finding she had left Beechwood. Apologising for giving you so much trouble through my neglect,

“ I remain,

“ Your most obedient
and humble servant,

“ GEORGE THOMPSON.”

His old friend, the young servant, evidently detailed for the service by collusion with the butler, brought in breakfast alone. This breakfast was a most sumptuous and elaborate piece of business. Silcote had taken a fancy to this youth, and probably gave some hint about his being royally entertained : at all events, he was so entertained, and with no one but his old friend to wait on him. His first act, I am happy to say, on seeing the coast perfectly clear, was to shake hands with his old friend, and look at him admiringly. They then lapsed into conversation.

“ Who brought this letter, George ? ” he asked.

“ A messenger from the Red Lion at Newley, the first thing this morning.”

“ It is to ask about my mother’s address,” said James.

“ You had best send it to them at once. He is a lawyer’s clerk, and seems to have come, in the first instance, after Miss Lee. But, when he found he was close to Beechwood, he drove down to the Bull, late as it was, and knocked them up, asking where Mrs. Sugden lived. And they told him they didn’t know, and that nobody knew ; for that she and her husband had been gone away this five year. And then he cussed owdacious, he did. And he had sixpenn’orth of rum hot, and he give the driver half a pint of beer, and he got in and he drove off, cussing like one o’clock. Your mother has come into some property, in my opinion ; and you had best let them lawyers know where she is, or they’ll put the whole of it into Chancery, to make business ; and then a fine lot your mother will ever see of it. Eat some more of that omelette ; and don’t let out that we was familiar together. Hogworth ” (the butler) “ warned me that he’d like to catch me at it ; and he is a tartar. But I have been doing on it all the same, you see. So long as you don’t mind, I’ll chance all about he.”

“ I mind, old fellow ? ” said James, quickly ; “ do you take me for a snob ? ”

“ Never a bit,” said the other. “ Only I must say, in self-defence, that you do look the gentleman all over. And so I was

a bit scared. There! Now, how *is* your mother? Your mother was a kind and good woman to me."

"I *don't* know," replied James. "I have never set eyes on her since the day I went to school."

"Never seen your mother! Well, I suppose we all get over that sort of thing in time. Why, I never see a boy that hankered after his mother more than what you did. Not that you ever wanted pluck, any more than me. Do you remember your turn up with Bates of the Blue Lion, the time his gang came after the Squire's pheasants, and found Captain Tom at home and your father awake?"

"I remember," said James.

"Pluck don't go by a chap's caring for his mother. I have had two or three fights; one only three months ago over *that* question. But I thought you was—so to put it—in that line yourself."

How little had he thought of her? Less, actually, than the Squire. One cannot give names to every phase of human passion. One can only speak of what one knows, and it would be well for the advance of human knowledge if every one were as honest as that. If one speaks of a sentimental fact, however immensely important, one will be accused of sentimentalism. It must be done, however. There came on this lad, James, all in one moment, a gush of intense tenderness for his mother. (I use the words handiest to me.) His remembrance of his mother came on him suddenly, and seemed to flood his soul; but the flood never poured out of his eyes. He was not of the crying sort. He walked out on the terrace perfectly dry-eyed. But there was a pang, a spasm at his heart, which told him that he had most basely forgotten the pleasantest companion, the wisest friend, the most loving over-looker of defects, the most gentle, kindly, and honest critic, that ever man had. He had forgotten his mother: and here was Dora, advancing from among the flower-beds—good honest Dora—perfectly ready to take her place.

This boy and girl were very fond of one another. Boys and girls do get very fond of one another even at that early age; but we have not much to do with that; we have more to do with older folk. So much we must say, however—that Dora was determined to spend a long day in his company, and found him in this low and most properly penitential frame of mind about his mother. She had expected to find him in a holiday mood, charmed and full of wonder at the glories of Silcotes, ready to give up the day to her, and wander away, sketching and romancing, from the highest point of the forest to the swanpiest island on the

river. He was prepared to do nothing of the kind, but told her everything, and then proposed to her to go with him and look at the old cottage. She encouraged him in his mood, pointed out to him how heartlessly he had behaved, and consented to undertake the pilgrimage to the old cottage, of which he held the key in his hand. Did she know that this bright-eyed young artist-lad was one of the most charming companions in the world? Did she know that he had a shrewd tongue in his head, and that she was a little bit afraid of it? Did she rejoice at getting an advantage over him, and having quieted his tongue for one day at least; getting him in his best and most sentimental mood? All this is quite possible, because she was a very clever young lady indeed. She immediately agreed to go to the old cottage with him.

A very sharp, shrewd, and keen young lady indeed, with a naturally quick intellect, with great personal courage and determination, all of which qualities had been considerably sharpened by the hand-to-mouth life she had led in her father's house at Lancaster Square,—pure, noble, good in every way, yet not without *knowledge* of evil. A girl brought up by a Miss Lee, among housemaids, is *not* without a knowledge of evil, although they may hate evil more deeply than if they were ignorant of it.

Did you ever see a deserted cottage? Samuel Reade has given us more than one deserted mansion: and pathetic and beautiful they are indeed. But to me (possibly because I have been connected with the artisan and labouring class so intimately all my life), a deserted cottage is more romantic than a deserted mansion. The desolation of the Tinley Hall estate is one thing, the ruin of a small cottage is another. The revenues of the Tinley estate still are paid in by the farmers, and there are heirs, and the property will recover, and a new house will be built. There is hope there. But in a deserted cottage the element of hope is wanting. A new six-roomed brick one may be built, and it will be better for all parties, but the old folks are gone—to the work-house. One seldom sees such a thing within a hundred miles of London, but one does sometimes. Again, when you see a deserted cottage you see that you have come to the very lowest verge of ruin. The hare is very near the hearthstone.

One seldom sees such a thing on the most neglected estate; but these two young people saw one that day, and it was a great contrast to the well-kept gardens of Silcotes. The garden was a jungle. The roses had grown until they could flower no longer; the lilies had spread out from their roots till they were scarcely more than a mass of yellow flowerless vegetation; the lavender was represented by a few sticks; while the tea-shrub had tangled

itself over the porch, until it had broken the frail wood, and made it necessary to lower your head as you put the key in the door.

"It is awfully lonely here," said James. "I knew every plant and flower; they were like living things to me. And now they are all stretching out their arms at us, and speaking. Do you hear them?"

"No. What do they say?"

"Neglect! Neglect!"

"Quite right, if they do," said Dora. "You are getting foolish, getting too artistic. Open the door, and let me in!"

"I am afraid," said James.

"Well, I am with you, and I am certainly not afraid. What are you afraid of?"

"Suppose, when you opened that door, and went into that deserted house, you were to see my mother standing waiting for us beside the cold hearth? What effect would that have on you, Dora?"

"Well, I suppose I should be frightened out of my wits. But I'll chance it; all the more because I know that nothing of the kind is at all likely to take place."

"Do you believe in ghosts?"

"I am sorry to say I do. It is very lamentable and humiliating: but, if my Aunt Mary had been your aunt, you would do the same."

"I believe that we shall see my mother's ghost the moment we enter that door," said James.

"But she isn't dead," said Dora.

"That doesn't matter," said James.

"Doesn't it?" said Dora. "Well, there is one way out of the difficulty. Give me the key, and let me go in first. You are actually frightening me now, with your nonsense. Give me the key, and let us go in; I am ashamed of you."

She took the key from him, and with a little difficulty opened the door, and they passed in together. There was no ghost to be seen. A certain kind of spider, which I have never been able to identify, had spun great webs in every available part of the little kitchen. Likewise there was a toad, who cast his beautiful eyes up to these two beautiful young creatures, as if asking what they, in all the power of their youth and their beauty, meant to do with him, the careful old keeper of this neglected house.

Dust—dull grey dust, everywhere; on the floor, on the solitary dresser, the last of the fixtures, on the jambs of the windows, everywhere. A dull grey colour of dust, like discoloured London

snow, settled down over everything ; a grey dust which had toned down everything like vivid colour everywhere, except in one place. Among the grey ashes of the long-cold hearth lay irregular pieces of paper, some only torn, some half-burnt. And Dora saw them ; and she spread herself before the fireplace to the full expanse of her crinoline and she said—

“ James, my dear, where is the little room in which you were sleeping when you were roused by the poachers ? You remember. Our first introduction, you know. I should very, very much like to see it.”

“ Up aloft here, and then turn to the right,” said James. “ Come up, and let me show you the old place.”

“ I am a little tired,” said Dora, “ and should like to sit still. Go up yourself ; I think, under the circumstances, that it would be better for you to go up alone. You may come down and fetch me up when you choose.”

He had hardly got on the first stair when she began to turn over the half torn, half burnt letters which lay amidst the ashes. She was shrewd and keen, and had heard the servants talk and joke, both at Silcotes and Lancaster Square. The first glance at these letters showed her that there was a mystery here for which she was utterly unprepared. The letters were all in one handwriting—not by any means the handwriting she had expected to find—for it was not her grandfather’s. They were in the large bold hand of her Uncle Thomas ; and were many of them signed by his name. The ink was yellow by time, but there stood unmistakeably the words, “ Your ever loving Tom Silcote,” in her uncle’s handwriting.

CHAPTER XXV.

AND KEEPS IT TO HERSELF.

“ AND,” thought out poor Dora, while James was lumbering about overhead, “ if he ever finds out this truth, he is a ruined man for life. I’ll burn them all.”

One must do her the credit to say that she was a wonderfully shrewd and determined girl. There was no chance of getting fire within half a mile. James was in a very sentimental mood about his mother ; and she knew that the moment he noticed these old letters he would wish to read them. Yet she, without fire, was

entirely determined that they should be burnt without being read.

He came slowly down after a little while, and she began at him. "How dreadfully close this room smells : like a vault."

"But there are no dead men here," said James. "Your nose is too aristocratic, Dora. *We* are well enough used to this close smell."

"And to low fever," replied Dora. "Fudge ; don't begin the dramatic repartee style of conversation just now. I say that the place smells like a vault. And so it does. You say that there are no dead men here, but there are dead folks' memories. Dead folks had much better be burnt. When I die I shall go in for incremation."

"You had better go in for it before, or you will find it too late. Who is talking nonsense now ?" asked James.

"I am ; but that is no business of yours. The place smells of dead folks' bones, and I hate the smell. I wish you would light your pipe, James. Don't say you have not got one, because I know better."

"I thought you did not like smoking ?"

"I like it here. Light your pipe, and let us have a comfortable talk. And it is cold. Cannot we light a fire ?"

James, like most schoolboys in these days, was provided with a pipe, tobacco, and matches. He very soon lit his pipe, and began smoking. When he had smoked for a minute or two he said—

"I always thought you spoke the truth."

"So I do," said Dora, looking sadly guilty.

"As in the present instance," said James. "Well, I have lit my pipe, which was the first thing you asked me to do ; and, as for the second, I will do it for you directly. You want a little fire to warm you. I will make it with those half torn, half burnt letters of my mother's which are lying among the ashes, and about which you have been trying to deceive me."

There was not much which was romantic about Dora. "The only fat Silcote since the Fall," Miss Raylock called her once. But "the only fat Silcote since the Fall" did become, on this occasion, somewhat romantic and powerful. This is the spectacle of a fat good-natured girl, standing before a fireplace, and scolding a schoolboy ; but hear what she said, with her finger pointed at him, as he lounged against the table smoking, and then judge.

"You are right about my having tried to deceive you, and my having failed. You are right about those letters referring to your mother, but you shall never see them, and for two reasons :—first,

because I will prevent you by sheer force ; and, secondly, because you daren't look at them. How dare you read your mother's letters ? ”

The pipe was put out now ; but he threw a box of matches on the damp brick floor at Dora's feet, and went out.

He waited for her outside in the beech wood, and they walked together, down hill, towards the river side by side, silent for a time. He spoke first, for she was resolute in silence.

“ What was in those letters ? ”

“ How should I know ? ” said Dora.

“ Did not you read them, then ? ”

“ I am not in the habit of reading other people's letters. I may be deceitful, but I never do that.”

“ Then why did you keep me from seeing them ? ”

“ Because on every ground it was infinitely less your business than any one else's. And, mind you, I have been accused of deceit to-day, and I don't like it. It is not a pleasant thing, you know, and you shall have the truth in future, I promise you. But I knew the handwriting, and I was determined that you should not see it. How much do you like that ? We were brought into the world, James, to disagree, and I think only to love one another the better for our disagreements. We have been brought up in hard schools, James, and we must make the best of one another. Now for the river.”

They got a boat, these two, and rowed together miles and miles down the pleasant reaches, and among the beautiful islands of the river. And Dora, who had thus early made it part of the scheme of her life to know everything and do everything, must, among other things, learn to row. And James had to teach her, and steer, which, on the whole, was very pleasant. When she looked out of the boat to see how her sculls were getting on, he would say, “ Eyes in the boat now ; look at me.” When she, in her painstaking efforts bit her lower lip, he said, “ Don't make faces ; put your mouth straight, you know, and look at me ; ” and she pouted her mouth out prettily enough, and looked at him. And when he said, “ Now mind about the feathering ; when you are at your furthest point forward, turn your wrists just a quarter of a circle, so,” she said—

“ Thank you very much. Verbal instructions are quite sufficient. You are not my uncle Arthur any more than I am Miss Lee. And you are not teaching me to play chants on the school-room piano.”

And James said “ Oho ! ” and relinquished the practical part of his task.

And Dora said "Oho!" also.

And James said, "And so he teaches her chants on the school-room piano, does he?"

"No, he don't," said Dora.

"I thought you said he 'does.' That is seven places down for grammar, by jingo."

"I did not," said Dora.

"Why!——"

"Why?" snatched up Dora, "because she won't let him. He *did* a year or less ago. But she won't have it now. Can you keep a secret?"

"No; but you had better tell it to me, for you know you cannot keep it to yourself."

"Well," said Dora, complacently, "I suppose I can't. If I could I should certainly not have invited you to share it. But I believe that Miss Lee has turned Roman Catholic."

"I say, Dora," said James, aghast; "think what an awful thing you are saying. You have no right to bring such an awful accusation against anybody without clear proof, you know."

"I don't bring any accusations. I only say what I think," said Dora, attending carefully to her sculling, and hitting herself severely in the ribs every third time she brought her sculls out of the water. "I say what I think: I always did; and as far as any poor silly idle purposeless mortal like you or me can predict, I always mean to. I believe that she has turned Roman Catholic."

"Why?"

"Well, 'why' is a short sentence. I believe it is customary in society to address a lady in something more than a monosyllable. My answer is that we will change the conversation. It appears that the same lawyer's clerk is looking up her and your mother at the same time. I wonder what those two can have been doing."

"Now, Beatrix!"

"Now, Benedict. Come, let us leave sharpening our silly little wits on one another. How are the new buildings at St. Mary's getting on?"

"Keep your eyes in the boat. I am lord and master here. They are going on very well."

"My eyes?"

"No, the buildings. I thought you were going to leave sharpening your silly little wits on me. Aha! my lady. The buildings are going on very well, I believe. They have made a confounded mess about the place with their bricks and mortar, and have dug some holes. But Chaos before Cosmos, you know."

"Gracious!" said Dora; "what long words we are getting to use!"

"Not at all," said James; "they are quite short. Mind your rowing."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FINAL DEVELOPMENT OF ST. MARY'S.

"Look at your cucumbers and marrows again, for instance," said Mr. Betts to the Squire on one occasion; "you put a thing like a little piece of deal chip into the ground, and in two months your head gardener comes to you and tells you that your marrow vine has got over the wall into the neighbour's garden, and that the neighbour objects, being serious, on the score of temptation. I was thinking of my own little crib in Islington, then, but the truth remains the same, Squire. An idea is like a vegetable marrow. It grows and develops so uncommon quick, that before you can look round, you find your serious neighbour going about with you quite savage, on the score of temptation. I illustrate this to you as a metaphor, Squire. I took up with this idea of St. Mary's Hospital quite casually. But it has grown on my hands until it has overgrown the neighbour's walls. Sir Hugh Brockliss is grumbling again."

"Confound the ass!" said Silcote.

"Not at all," said Betts. "Although by your influence I have just been carried in triumphantly to the office of treasurer, and am provided for handsomely for life: and although I take this opportunity of giving you my most sincere thanks—but there's a pair of us, ain't there? You like the receiving of thanks as little as I like giving 'em—although Sir Hugh may be an ass, and, in regard to barts. generally, I hold that they are neither the one thing nor the other: yet still I say, don't confound him. He don't want any confounding. What he may have to learn from you I don't know—I ain't a gentleman: but you have a great deal to learn from him. And, what is much more important, we want his name. In what I am going to do, we want a good name, and his is a good one. Not first-class you say, but still it is one which will go down, for want of a better, with the High Church Liberals; and unless we get them we had better put the money into the Illinois Central."

"What the deuce are you going to do with me now?" said Silcote.

"Sir Hugh Brockliss," continued Mr. Betts, "has got a good and most respectable name, and we must have it. Therefore you be civil to him: at least as civil as you can manage. We must have one tolerably respectable name. I should like a bigger one than his, but we haven't got it, and must do the job with the materials. He is all against the whole thing, but he is, as you so shrewdly said, an ass, and will believe the last thing that is said to him. And so I want you to be civil to him, because I intend to go into the moderately High Church business; it is the paying one, Squire, and I mean to make this thing pay. And for that we want names, and his name is the only respectable one we have got."

"There is mine," said the Squire; "is *that* no use?"

"Lor' bless you," said Betts, "a deal worse than no name at all. It's a lucky thing for you, Squire, that your father was born before you. If you had had to grub about for your own fortune, you would be in No. 1A, Queer Street, just now. A name is a marketable thing in England, as any fool knows; but you have made such a mess of your name that I, even I, can't discount it, and am obliged to discount Sir Hugh Brockliss' instead of you."

"You rather maze me, Betts. What have I done?"

"Done? Nothing; about the worst thing you could do in these steam-engine days; and talked a heap of nonsense the while."

"As a matter of curiosity, my dear Betts, may I ask you what you wish me to do?"

"I wish you to be civil to Sir Hugh Brockliss. We must have a name, and yours is no good."

"I submit to you. I will be civil to Sir Hugh Brockliss. Any further directions?"

"There is another bart. whose property, as they say, 'impinges' on ours at St. Mary's, who ought to be conciliated. Do you know his name?"

"No."

"Then I don't; for the nonce."

"Now, sir," growled Silcote.

"Furthermore," said Betts, "I think it would be much better if you left off going to the Board. I do, indeed."

"And why for instance?"

"There are many reasons," said Betts. "It is a long way, for instance; and again——"

"And, again, Sir Godfrey Mallory is coming back, and you and

Miss Raylock don't think that it is right for me to run the chance of coming against him. What asses you people are ! Women of course think, and always will, that they can set wrong things right by advice. That is nothing new. They will have power somehow, as the Wife of Bath knew. But look at yourself. Do you know what you are ? You are a bankrupt stockbroker, a man whom I have made over again. You owe me everything, and five minutes ago you were prepared to take possession of me, body and bones, and order me about like a schoolboy. I took you up, because you pleased me : if you cease to please me, I shall put you down again. Have the goodness to understand that I am master, and you are servant. Have you brains enough for that ? ”

“ I didn't mean any offence, sir. ”

“ A fox don't mean any offence. But he gives it. He can't help it. Now look you here. You have been alluding to Sir Godfrey Mallory. ”

“ I never mentioned his name, sir. ”

“ How I could make you lie, if I took the trouble ! You know you mentioned him, and while you were in your bantam-cock vein, you said you did not know his name ‘ for the nonce. ’ Now you mind what you are about. If you ever dare to go into, in any way, my relations with that man, I'll smash you. That is plain enough, is it not ? ”

It certainly was.

“ And I'll have no colloquing with that old Miss Raylock. She has never had anything to do in her lifetime but mind other folks' business, and, when she found anything worth writing about, to hang up her neighbours before the public, for about five hundred pounds apiece. She is living on the proceeds of her wicked old iniquity now. The interest in me, and in her knowledge of my inconceivable wrongs, is enough to pay her butcher and baker at this day. And, again, I'll have no colloquing with my sister. She may, or may not, be a fool, but she is my sister. And I will not have you in communication with Kriegsthum. I am perfectly aware that your connexion with him began in some queer business about foreign bonds, but it must end now. I don't know that I have any more hints to give you at present, but, when I have, you shall get them hot and heavy. Stay, one more ; old Raylock, or my sister, or some fool, has evidently given you some notion about my former domestic relations. Now, leave these matters alone, will you ? You don't know how to handle such matters. On one or two occasions I have seen you speak up like a man for my eldest son Algernon. I liked you for that. But, once for all, understand, that you are too coarse a hand to touch on any

domestic relations of mine. Now go on. You have some scheme on hand. Go on."

"Well, sir, that is rather difficult, after your late outbreak."

"Difficult! I suppose it *is* difficult; but I never said that a beaten dog hunted free. You have had the travel taken out of you, have you? There, let us leave quarrelling. I have ten times your brains, and fifty times your determination. And I have venison, champagne, a most neat sort of sherry, considerable influence, and a strong personal liking for yourself. In exchange for all these good things I merely ask you to amuse me, and to let things, which a man in your position can't in the least understand, alone. Amuse me, therefore. What is this wonderful scheme of yours? Let us have it."

Mr. Betts unfolded it to him, and we will do so to the reader.

"Oh, but he is a brimstone," Mr. Betts remarked in confidence to Algernon afterwards. "I went a ha'porth too far, and didn't I *catch* it! All our tongues are unruly members, I am given to understand. But Smith O'Brien ain't a more unruly member than his. I know I ain't going to run the risk of it *again*."

It will have been seen, from the above conversation, that Mr. Betts was now treasurer of St. Mary's. The old treasurer having, as Mr. Betts expressed it, "dropped," and the Silcote influence, since the retirement in dudgeon of Sir Hugh Brockliss, being supreme, Mr. Betts had been appointed. Sir Hugh described the business as a shameful job, which rather made Betts wince. Because, if Sir Hugh could not swallow *that*, if he called *that* a job, what on earth would he say when the enormous, gigantic, and audacious job which was then just being matured in the stock-broking brain of Mr. Betts was unfolded to him, as it must be in the course of business?

However, there he was, treasurer, and a most splendid treasurer he made. As the Squire himself most truly said to the Board, "You could not have got another man in all England so good for the same money." He was a most excellent man of business.

But he was more. If he was one thing more than another, he was a speculator. His splendid knowledge of finance had prevented him making more than one false step in his life. And for years after his bankruptcy he was a shipwrecked, poor man; a man who felt mean; and again still meaner whenever any of his feeble little schemes went wrong, as they did, for want of money. But the moment he found himself in a high position again, the moment he had the handling of considerable sums of money, the old passion revived.

The man had poetry in him somewhere, and it found vent in the

only way it could. The man's education will always be used to bring out the poetry which may happen to be in him. Look at Quentin Matsys. Betts had had but one education, the education of money. The poetry in the man, the creative power, was forced to express itself in money. To *make* three or four sovereigns out of one—to *make* a fortune—was his kind of *poetry*. He didn't *want* the money. He did not want the money's worth. He only wanted to use what seemed to him a creative faculty, and *make* it. Look round and see if I am not right. Are the money-makers money-spenders? And are they ever contented till they are in their coffins, any more than a poet is contented with verse-making until his hand is too feeble to hold the pen?

His idea was this:—the revenues of St. Mary's were little inferior to those of Eton. The demand for good schools was just setting in. Why should he not make St. Mary's the greatest school in England? He determined that he would try.

All this was perfectly fair. Betts was only a specimen of one kind of British merchant, the kind who can't have the handling of money without trying to "turn it over." He now, after many years, found the beloved cash passing through his fingers once more. The old stockjobbing instinct, the poetry of the man, developed again suddenly. He did not care for money's worth. His salary was good; and out of it he assisted Algernon to pay part of his lawyer's bills (Algernon having been prosecuted by his churchwardens for lighting seven candles on his communion-table before dark. He said it was dark, and the churchwarden's people said it wasn't; and "it went against" Algernon). Betts did not in the least care about his own money, but he most particularly liked handling that of other people. He knocked up a splendid scheme for making St. Mary's greater than Eton, and it was to a certain extent successful.

There was no difficulty with the Board about it. The Silcote influence was high. The more intelligent members of the Board knew perfectly well that Betts had done well for the charity in helping to get it moved into the country, and also that his was the greatest arithmetical head among them. He was their Napoleon, and had earned the right to be entrusted with armies. And this man would give them prestige, by getting up a bigger thing, in which their names should have the old predominance. There was no difficulty with the Board at all, so far. Sir Hugh Brockliss himself, so far as this part of the business was concerned, behaved himself like a courteous and highbred lamb, with a great power of bowing. "The spread of a sound education was one of the things nearest to his heart. He had never been thrown against com-

mercial complications himself; but he had no doubt that perfectly blameless people were sometimes seriously affected by them. His general rule in life had been to hold out the hand of fellowship to any member of the community pointed at by the finger of scorn. Whether it was advisable that any member of a Board should use his undoubted influence to get a member of his own family, or, to speak more correctly, his son's father-in-law, appointed to a post of trust in which"—and then he mazed himself in a labyrinth of grammar, and broke his shins among involved sentences, leaving the Board with the impression that he was a good-natured old ass. As indeed he was. The Board determined to build on to the school, and to make it, if possible, the greatest school in England.

But this was not the job which Betts had in his head. Silcote accepted all this with perfect complacency, when he had once scolded Betts into submission. Betts had dreaded Sir Hugh Brockliss as the great enemy. But, after he had got the last taste of the Squire's tongue, had seen that the devil in Silcote was not always dumb, he began to see that Silcote himself might turn against the job: for one reason, if no other—that Algernon was involved in it. But he was an obstinate man, of the same breed of man who waited at Waterloo till the Prussians came up. He wanted the thing done, and he did it in his own way—defiant and obstinate.

"You agree with all we have said. Now the question arises about the head master. We must have a first-class man for head master; we must, to make it pay, you know; a first-class man. A Hertford scholar, you know, a man of mark:—a man whose name in an advertisement before leader will be like the unfolding of a banner. Now you'll have to pay such a man as this. Through the nose."

"I suppose we must," said Silcote.

"I suppose you must also. But then I have calculated every halfpenny, and we haven't got the money to pay him."

"I ain't going to find the money, if you mean that," said Silcote.

"I don't mean anything of the kind," said Betts. "Taisez, Taisez. I have been in a general way knocking round and asking questions."

"Is Kriegsturm your man?"

"No, Kriegsturm ain't. But I find, going into details, that the man we want as head master can't be got under twelve hundred a-year. Not the man we want can't. And we must pension the present old man who calls himself head master, with five hundred a year. And I can't find the money."

"Then you must drop the scheme till you can," said the Squire.

"Why no," said Betts. "I know a man up to every requirement, who could do it for seven hundred and fifty."

"Snap him up, then."

"I have. Do you care to know his name? It is Arthur Silcote."

"Do you mean that Arthur has lent himself to this job?"

"Yes, I do. And this ain't half of it. As for Arthur, he wants rest, and he will get it here."

"Will he?" said Silcote.

"I told you you had not heard half of the business. You must have ever so many more masters. Now, I know of one who would suit exactly. Not a first-class man, but a good man enough, and accustomed to tuition."

"My dear friend, let me have his name, without any more beating about the bush. Do go straight at it."

"Algernon Silcote, my son-in-law."

The Squire stood mute.

"You're a bold man, Betts: but this is too bold. The Brockliss party won't stand it, man. The *world* won't stand it. I, the chairman of the Board, get my son's father-in-law appointed as treasurer—as treasurer—and immediately appoint one of my sons as head master, and another second master! It won't do; I cannot consent. We shall have the *Times* down on us. I admire your audacity, but it won't do."

"Arthur is going to send in his testimonials, and you must give it him. No man within miles of him will apply at such a salary. You can't oppose *him*. And if you stand in your eldest son's light it will be attributed to wrong motives. He is going to send in *his* testimonials, and, if you give the weight of your name against your own son, worse things will be said of you than if you jobbed him into fifty places. There are those who think him an ill-used man already. But, if you change your passive neglect into open and active hostility, and stand between him and his poor children's bread, you will have worse things said of you than anything the *Times* will over the mere matter of a small job like this. And, lor! it is nothing!"

"Not to you, perhaps," said the Squire, laughing, "but I am not so used to this sort of thing. I suppose it will look a little less disgraceful and preposterous when I get a little more used to it. But about Mr. Silcote. What has he been doing? I thought his church was full."

"That is just where it is, Squire. He can't do without me. I

must have him under my own eye ; I can't trust him out of my sight. No sooner did I begin to stay here, no sooner was my back turned, than he goes to Oxford, and stays with his old friends. I've seen him tending to it for a long time. He began Lowish enough Church, you know, but all the old college friends he really ever cared for were High Church, and he has come round to 'em at last. I warned him of it. I spoke seriously to him. I pointed out to him the danger and error of such a course ; that it led to the still more degrading superstitions of Rome ; that his church was not adapted for it, being what you may call of an orthodox style of architecture ; that his congregation hated M.B. like poison ; and that the thing had never been made to pay commercially. But I couldn't make him see it. Not being a religious man yourself, Squire, I hope I give no offence in saying that it is very difficult to make really religious men see things in a commercial point of view."

"Oh, you couldn't, eh?" said the Squire, shaking his great chest with internal laughter at the mental spectacle of Betts trying to argue Algernon out of his religious convictions on commercial grounds. "So he wouldn't listen to you, eh?"

"Not a bit of it," said Betts. "I knew he would make a mess of it if I didn't stay by him. I saw he was getting bent on it ; and consequently I knew he'd do it sooner or later ; for his name is Silcote you know,—that's about what his name is. And the last words I said to him were : 'If you find that your mind leads you to it,' I said, 'I suppose you must do it. But,' I said, 'let 'em down easy. Preach up to it cautious,' I said. 'If it's the right thing,' I said, 'go in for it ; though as a last word it hasn't took in the north part of London, and is against my own principles ; but, whether it's right or wrong, there is no harm in making it pay in a commercial point of view. Lor' bless you,' I said, 'I have made many things pay in my time, and, if you give me time, I may make this ; though no one has yet. Now I am going to your father' (meaning you), 'and, if you are determined, begin preaching up to it cautious.'"

"I hope he followed your advice," said the Squire, laughing more kindly than he had done for thirty years.

"My advice!" said Betts, utterly unconscious of the amusement he was causing. "Isn't he a Silcote? He preached in his surplice the first Sunday I was away. Ah! I'm telling you the bare truth: he turns the chairs towards the altar, and he calls *that* letting 'em down easy. What on earth are you laughing at? I don't see anything to laugh at."

"I won't laugh any more if I can help it ; but, good Betts, has

his course been successful? Won't he let his pews better in consequence of this ceremonialism?"

"I tell you that that sort of thing don't suit our Islington folks all of a sudden. They want letting down easy, and he has gone and let 'em down by the run. And he has emptied his church. And he must have this master's place; and, if you get out of it with that, without my coming on you for a couple of hundred pounds to pay his tradesmen and his doctor, you may think yourself lucky."

"But he is a Puseyite, Betts," said Silcote, as soon as he had smothered his internal laughter; "and, according to your own confession, Puseyism don't pay; and our own apology to human decency, for the outrageous job in which we are both concerned, will be to make it pay. This Algernon Silcote is a marked Puseyite; they have left his church, and the boys have cast squibs and crackers into his area. We shall ruin the whole thing if we take a man half-way to Rome into the business."

"And how will you get out of that, I wonder?" thought the Squire as he stood behind Betts, with a more genial light in his eyes than any one could remember to have seen before. "This is fun, and seems to rattle one's heart about pleasantly. How will you, you kind old rogue, make this thing fit?"

The kindly old rogue was blessed in resource; he had only to bite his finger in silence for less than one minute, when he found himself able to push towards his idea through a vague skirmishing army of commonplaces.

"Why, there's various ways of looking at things, Squire; what's treason in one place is patriotism in another. In a similar way what is orthodoxy in a cathedral is Puseyism in a church. Architecture has a deal to do with it; and we are going in for the highest style of architecture procurable for money. Close imitation of the old buildings. Real mediæval, none of your renaissance, tag-rag, and bobbery. Lor' bless you, his surplice won't be noticed in *our* chapel! Why we chant the Psalms now, and Algernon will go in for everything short of incense, and we are safe with *him*, you know. And there is a further consideration for your not opposing Algernon's nomination as master."

"And what is that?" asked Silcote.

"This," said Betts, suddenly and furiously, in a way which strangely startled the Squire; "just because, if this man Algernon Silcote is kicked out in the cold to starve with his children, by George, I'll pitch the whole thing to the devil. If he has to beg, by George, I'll beg alongside of him. If he has to go to the workhouse, I'll go to the workhouse with

him ; if he has to stand in the dock, I'll stand alongside of him. He will never take a penny from me. And he sees it out with me through thick and thin ; through a bitterer time than *you're* ever seen. Come ! And by George, I'll see it out with him to the end and finish of it all. If I don't, may——"

"Hush, my friend, hush !" said Silcote, laying his hand very gently on Mr. Betts's shoulder. "Don't scold and swear. You have scolded yourself into tears during a business conversation. How very unbusinesslike ! Be quiet ; I will do everything you wish for this gentleman. He was my late wife's son, you know. Now that I see what you are, I will tell it all to you some day. Not now. Let one man make a fool of himself at a time. Now have you got any other officers in your eye, you audacious old schemer ? Won't you appoint me shoeblack, and request Sir Hugh Brockliss to undertake the office of scavenger ? "

Betts laughed. "Well, now it's over, we may as well have a little talk to get it out of our heads. Officers ? Ah, we want a new matron, and had better see to it at the next Board. Old Mrs. Jones is past her work. She will be swallowing her spectacles soon. I've had to advertise without waiting for the Board. You will pension her, of course ! "

"Of course."

"And Berry ? He ought to be pensioned, you know."

"He'll last. How about the matron ? "

"One application, which seems likely. Splendid certificate, but belongs to a sisterhood."

"That won't do. We can't have a Roman Catholic woman with a wimple about the place."

"She wears no dress, and, I believe, takes no vows, and she is a Protestant. She is evidently a tip-top person. If you don't object, she ought to be snapped up."

"Is she used to this kind of thing ? "

"She has been used to everything pretty nigh, from her testimonials. She was in the Crimea to begin with. The doctors at the Small-pox Hospital at Manchester wrote and asked for her, but the lady superintendent writes to me to say that she has set her heart on this. You had best have her."

"She will be better than a Gamp, I suppose. I see no difficulty. Large salary ? "

"Lor' bless you, her sort don't take money. She must be decently found, but she mustn't be offered money. That was expressly mentioned."

"We will have her in, my Betts. What is her name ? "

"Mrs. Morgan. *They* call her Sister Mary, but she is to be called Mrs. Morgan if she comes to us."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MRS. MORGAN.

I BELIEVE that Mr. Betts, in his ignorance, actually thought that Arthur's work at St. Mary's would be lighter than that at Balliol. It is impossible that Arthur could have thought so, but he may have thought that some change in the form of his eager activity would amount to a kind of rest: for of rest, consisting of actual quiescence, he was utterly incapable. It was known to but very few, of whom his father was one, that on several occasions he had fainted. The first doctor he had consulted on this alarming symptom had spoken so very gravely of the symptoms that he had found it necessary at last to tell his father, which he did the day before James arrived at Silcote. Another doctor, however, had given a more cheering account; there had been no recurrence of the symptoms; and here he was fairly installed lord and master of the new *régime*.

His buildings were not quite finished, but his boys were due. He had been three days there, and in those three days there had been some fifty waking hours: and, in that time, if Arthur had evolved from his steam-engine brain one scheme for making matters better, he had evolved fifty: one an hour certainly. He was a little anxious about his appearance; the glass told him that he looked younger than a great many schoolboys. He found himself, therefore, uncommonly apt to stand on his dignity this evening: but there was no one to show off on except poor Algernon, and *he* was no use. Any one could bully him.

However, he walked across the moonlit quadrangle to his brother's house. It was a pleasant house, opening out of the cloisters, and looking down on the lake. The children were in bed. He found his brother reading in his handsome crimson-furnished study. He was glad to see his dear old friend so well-housed and comfortable after his troubles; and he said—

“How do you think you shall like this new life, Algernon?”

“Not at all,” was the reply.

This was scarcely encouraging. His brother did not seem inclined for talking. It occurred to him that he might as well go and see how the matron was getting on; and so he went towards the dormitory, where he expected to find her busy. There was a light in one of the sixth-form studies, and he directed his feet that way. “I wonder where she is, and what

she is like," he asked himself. "By the bye, they say that she is something very superior."

Here she was at last, putting one of the sixth-form boys' studies tidy: a most remarkable-looking woman indeed. As *Arthur* saw the face, it was the face of a woman who had been beautiful: a very powerful and resolute face even now. She was quite grey, and wore her hair banded back into a knot behind. Her dress was grey, of a somewhat superior texture, and she wore a long grey shawl, which nearly covered everything, pinned close up to her throat; hair, shawl, and gown all nearly of the same colour. She had no ornaments about her except a white cross, which hung at her side; and Arthur, seeing a *lady* before him, immediately took off his cap, and made his best bow: all the schoolmasterism knocked out of him at once. She crossed her arms on her bosom, and bowed reverently: and then they began to talk.

"You seem perfect mistress of your duty, Mrs. Morgan."

"I have been carefully trained to it, and, being naturally clever, I have mastered it."

"You will give great satisfaction here, I see."

"I suppose I shall. I mean to do so."

This was not said with the slightest approach to flippancy, but there was a tamed and deliberated boldness in her way of speaking, to which Arthur applied in his own mind the epithet "splendid."

"I hope we shall work well together, Mrs. Morgan. I am rather apt to be fidgetty and exacting, but I will try not to be so with one so evidently skilled in detail as yourself."

"There is little doubt that we shall work well together, sir. I intend that we should. Your boys are due to-morrow morning. At what time, do you think?"

"All hours, Mrs. Morgan. Up to chapel time at nine in the evening."

"Those who come from close by are the first, of course; and those from long distances the latest?"

"No. I should say rather the reverse. But you cannot tell. I am only judging from Oxford. Can I do anything for you?"

"Nothing; thank you very much. There are one or two matters of detail I wish mended: would it be your place to mention them to the Board, or mine?"

"Yours, certainly."

"I shall have to appear before the Board, then?"

"Of course, if you have any report to make. And now, good-

night. May I be allowed to say that I have had a pleasant surprise?"

"And I also," she said, with a very pleasant, honest smile. "May I ask one question more. Do you keep the chapel door open?"

"I will be most careful to do so. It was always my intention to do so. By the bye, have you found your way there yet?"

"I am never long in doing that," she said. "And now, good-night."

She had to light him down some stairs, and, when he saw her last, standing on the top of a flight of steps, the light was strong on her face and hair. What with her grey hair and grey clothes, she seemed, as she bent her head towards him, to be dressed in a radiance of silver. Waking up once or twice, he thought of her in the chapel, and how very little he should like to stand in some dark corner and see her come sliding silently towards him in the moonlight.

But it was not to the chapel or to prayer that she betook herself that night. She had prayed over this matter long enough, and now began to doubt whether she would wish her prayers answered or not. "I have prayed so earnestly that he should not recognise me. And yet, if he does not——"

Up and down, hour after hour, between the two long lines of white beds, went the grey, ghost-like figure, passing from band to band of bright moonlight which was thrown from the long Gothic windows across the dormitory. Arthur had thought of her as an awful figure to meet sliding along the midnight aisles of the chapel. Had he seen her now, as she paced up and down, with her silver-grey hair flashing in the moonlight as she passed each window, and her whole figure becoming black as she passed the alternating shadows, he would have thought her more awful still. Up and down nearly all night, with the sleeping world around her. Incapable of prayer now, for she was half wishing that the constant prayer of the last three months might be unanswered. The High Church folks had tamed her wonderfully, and there was no exclamation, no gesticulation. But no system of religion, of which I have heard, has any rule against a woman's walking swiftly up and down all night, with a whole world of loving and longing in her heart, unable for the time to pray, unless it were to pray that her prayers might not be answered.

So for the night. The morrow found her seated in her room, at her duties, directing her maidens, cool, calm, cheerful, business-like; with piles of the boys' linen around her. It was buttons and needles and thread now; and kindly religious talk,

and sensible advice to the demurely-clad servants who were assisting her. "A pleasant kind lady," said the maidens to one another. "A wonder to find a real lady taking such a place as this." Yet, though she was majestic, she was very genial; and not a girl of them all but felt that she was in the presence of a person the like of whom she had never seen before.

She did not talk "goody" to them; nothing of the kind. She inquired about each of them kindly, but not obtrusively, and somehow managed to leave each of them with the impression that religion was the principle to which all others must be deferred, without in the least degree thrusting the idea upon them.

She was absolutely inexorable in details, they noticed. No missing button could escape her eye. Yet she had nothing of the "Tartar" in her, like the old goose, now pensioned, Mother Berry.

"Get the new uniforms out, my dear," she said to the youngest maiden, "and lay them in a row. The boys should begin to arrive soon. At what time do they generally begin to come?" Little thought the demure damsels what a wild expectant woman's heart was raging and beating beneath that solemn grey shawl. They were awed and hushed by her awful calm solemnity: they little thought of the volcano within. If they had they would have only wondered. They were maidens, and knew not of the Storgè.

At last the boys began to arrive, or, to say more truly, creep in. For the first arrivals were two feeble little orphans, presentation boys, aged ten and nine, coming to get their uniforms; torn by the inexorable necessity of poverty from their mother; terrified at everything and coming here for shelter. Her two long arms came from beneath her long grey shawl, until they formed horizontally a cross to her body; and she said, "Come here, my dears, to me." And they looked in her face, and then they crept to her, one under each arm, and were frightened no more.

Then others came, and then more, until her eye got bewildered with their numbers and their varieties; and her ear got confused with the wonderful differences of their voices; she all the time, though doing her duty steadily and mechanically, waiting to hear one voice; which, although it must be changed by now, she thought she would be able to recognise. The other boys came swarming into her, big and little, in all manner of moods, but the voice she longed to hear was dumb to her as yet.

They were in all moods, these boys. Some were low in their minds, almost to being penitential: there were those who were the most inclined for tears. Others were fractious and petulant;

others facetious; others from the very first riotous. They all looked at her curiously, as though to see how much nonsense she would stand; and, finding no clue to the answer in her calm benign face and figure, began an inductive course of experiments, with a view of finding out what her temper really was, and what stand she was likely to take.

Though they tried her hard, she was perfectly calm and good-humoured. The bolder spirits began dancing and fighting before her very soon. Still she took no notice whatever, only now and then quietly smiled.

The riot got most fast and furious. They whirled into her room and out of it again. They fought one another in play, and rolled over and over on the ground. They put on their clean night-gowns over their clothes, and danced in them, sometimes singly, sometimes in a mad aimless carmagnole, sometimes waltzing in pairs, and coming headlong over together. The demurest and oldest of her maidens protested mildly. "Madam," she said, "you will never be able to manage them if you allow them this liberty." She said, "*I will manage them. I am not here as a disciplinarian. Are boys not to play? Is the sun not to shine? Besides, girl, I am waiting. Leave them alone, girl.*"

Waiting, but not much longer. There was a new noise in the cloister and corridor, and the burden of it was, "Here's old Sugden."

She could not pretend to stitch now. She folded her hands over her work, and said to herself in prayer, "God, let it be Thy way." And then she sat and looked at the crowd of young faces and young figures before her, keeping her eyes towards the door.

A glorious lad, with vitality and vigour in every limb, and with youth, health, goodness, ay, and not a little beauty too, in his face, came hurling in. Their eyes met. She sat perfectly calm, praying silently, with her folded hands clasping one another, painfully. She saw that, when his eyes met hers, the expression of them changed from rollicking vivacity to wonder, to admiration, to respect. But there was no sign of recognition. Her prayers were answered. Her own son did not know her. It was well.

It was very well, save for one ghastly spasm at the heart, which she did not allow to show in her face. Yes, it was very well.

"Now, Mrs. Morgan," he began, "you must take care to be especially civil to me. I am the oldest boy here, very nearly; and you will follow me when I say that I am a power in the place. Your policy will be to treat me with peculiar consideration and respect, and never on any account report me. You will be particular about that; do you see?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Morgan.

"You see I am so clever, my dear Mrs. Morgan, and of such a very strong will, that natures less gifted than mine must naturally yield to me. And *physique* goes a long way, you know. About my personal appearance there can only be but one opinion, I believe. Have the kindness to look on me, Mrs. Morgan, which you don't seem inclined to do, and see whether or no I am a beauty."

"And indeed you are," said the mother's heart within her. The boy had meant nothing whatever by what he had been saying. It was all what he would have called "chaff." But, when she turned her great kind eyes upon his, and laughed low in answer, he got puzzled, and began to think he had gone too far in some way. How, he could not conceive, for she was not angry.

"You don't mind my nonsense, do you? I forgot you were a lady. I don't mean any harm. The last matron was not a lady, you know."

"I don't mind your nonsense," said she.

"You don't, eh? Very well, then, allow me to give you a little more of it; permit me to tell you that you don't know your duties as a matron in this establishment. Look at the hay these fellows are making about your room, and you sitting there sewing on buttons. Your duty as matron is to get into a blind wax, to bounce out of your chair, to catch the first boy you come across (as it might be me, you know) by the hair of his head, bang his head against that wall, and clear the room. The other matron always did."

"Then you think," she said, "that I could not do it except in that way?"

"Not you; you don't know us."

"Do I not? Watch me."

The tall grey figure rose to its full height, and that attracted some. Her voice made them all quiet at once from curiosity, if from nothing else. It was round, full, powerful, and most wonderfully audible. "My dear boys," she said, "look at me, and listen. I have been used to order, and accustomed to have it when I command it. There has been disorder enough, and I must have order now. You hear? Go, and go quickly. Sugden, stay; the rest go."

They went like lambs, and James was left alone with his mother.

"There, you see," she said to him when they were gone; "that seems wonderful to you, does it not? If one could deal with all the ghastly disorder in this world as easily as I have with

that little riot, why then, boy, the world would the sooner be ready for the second coming of Christ. For they may set the time of His coming by stars and by numbers, but He will never come again, boy, until we, by tears and by blood, by life-long struggles for the good, through ridicule and poverty and self-denial, have made this world fit for Him. Then He will come and we shall see Him."

This was so utterly unlike anything which James had heard in sermons, that he was a little awed. He had a dim idea that it was strangely expressed; but also that it meant something. He had to speak, and he said—

"You are not angry with me?"

She, with her whole heart yearning for one kiss, angry with him! If she could only make any pretext for getting near him, touching him, feeling his breath, putting her hand over his hair! How subtle and quick the Storgè makes a mere hen; do you think Mrs. Morgan-Sugden was to be beaten? Not she.

"Your collar is all frayed, Sugden," she said.

"It is an old shirt," said he.

"I shall not have your clean shirt ready before to-morrow," she said; "and you can't go about that figure. Come here, and I will set it right."

"Shall I leave it out?"

"No, come and have it done. I have too much to think about."

So she got him near her, and in doing her work would lay her hand sometimes on his shoulder. Close to her; yet the one sweet kiss, for which her mother's soul thirsted, as far away as ever. The work was done; one more little artifice was left her before he must go. She put her hand over and through his short curls, and said, "You must have your hair cut, Sugden; I don't allow long hair."

"It was cut a fortnight ago, ma'am," urged James.

"Then it must be cut again to-morrow," she answered. "Look here," she said, drawing one gently out, "this lock is much too long. Now off, boy; I have much to do."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SILCOTE ESCAPES FROM THE REGION OF BOREDOM.

It got to be terribly dull for the Squire at Silcotes that autumn.

Betts was, of course, installed in his new lodgings at St. Mary's, doing his new duties at the school, fussing, examining into everything, directing, advising those above him in authority, and bullying his inferiors like fifty Bettses. Arthur was there likewise, hard at it. The Princess was *supposed* to be at Silcotes, but was mostly in London or elsewhere, her only public appearances being at the Twyford Station, where she periodically was seen by admiring country neighbours, exquisitely dressed, gorgeously bejewelled, taking her ticket, and dropping her change. The Squire was reduced to his old company. No one was left to him but Anne. It was awfully dull.

Why? He had got on like this for thirty years, and never found it exactly dull. He had made out his time pretty well. He shot a little, and rode a great deal, when he found himself getting dull in old times. He tried these remedies now, but they would not do. He shot better than ever, and never swore at the keeper, but engaged him in conversation. He rode his splendid horses hard and far, and, one day, sneaked so near to the meet, that he got into the ruck of men, and went away like a bird; going hard and well, cutting down most of the field. The hunt did not one-half of them know his person, but at the first check it got whispered abroad that the man who rode so well on that great bay was no other than that *bête noire*, Dark Squire Silcote. They killed the fox after a most tremendous run, and the Squire was in with the very few at the death—finish—or what they call it. The master rode up to him, and spoke a few cheery neighbourly words to him (the Squire was a fifty-pound subscriber), and Silcote found himself chatting eagerly and pleasantly to the master about the run, with an almost boyish animation.

But, as he rode home through the darkness, he was the Dark Squire again—darker than ever; and Silcotes was duller than ever that night. All the profusion, all the really well-ordered beauty of the place had got hateful to him.

And why? Firstly, because the memory of a great wrong was beginning to die out of the man's soul—of a wrong so inconceivably and unutterably great, that when I have to tell you of it, as I shall have to do immediately, I see that I must touch with the lightest pencil in my case—because I say the memory of that

wrong was getting weakened by kind old Time ; who, if he does let die or sweep aside old loves, at all events does the same for old hatreds and wrongs. Secondly, because the man had been aroused from his selfish stupid torpor by new ideas and new interests ; and this fact, acting and reacting with the mere effect of time, had made his old, tedious, selfish life disgusting to him.

That a man of such intense moral and physical vitality should have slept so long, may seem surprising to any one who had never seen his face. But Nature told his story plainly enough to those who would read. The deep-sunk eyes, so close together, told her story about the man, retiring as they did under the heavy eyebrows, as though they would shrink into the very soul. The gait of the man, slouching and suspicious, in spite of his great physical strength—the head always thrust forward—told the very same story. The story of a man who had the deepest hatred of publicity,—the deepest jealousy of any fellow-man seeing for one moment into his soul. And yet at the bar, whilst he was there, the man was distinguished for an audacity and a disrespect of persons and formulas which amounted to bad taste.

Was this unnatural ? Surely not. His defiant impudence was an effort always, an unnatural effort ; and he will confess that, in making that effort, he always said far more than he meant. A man who cannot debate without getting fierce had better leave debate alone. There was no more harm in the Squire than this. He, although with nearly first-rate talents, was suspicious and jealous beyond most Englishmen ; and to this man there had happened a hideous and inconceivable wrong. And the man had shut himself up, his wealth allowing him to do so, and growled his soul out to his sister and his servants and his bloodhounds. That is all.

But this course of procedure would not do any longer at all. The man, such as he was, was roused and wakened. Arthur began it by leading him into this St. Mary's Hospital business, which had involved Betts. And now he found that he could not do without his Betts. Betts's intense realism was at first a rather pleasant foil for his own suspicious sentimentalism ; but Betts had now become a necessity, as ice is to an American. Betts and he had fought out, and carried through, what he thought (with intense pleasure, I am bound to say) a most scandalous job. And there was Betts down at the school, getting all the fun, and he, the Squire, left alone with Anne at Silcotes. It was terribly dull.

Well, and Anne. And again Anne. Mrs. Sugden, that remarkable peasant woman, had told him once that he was making a rod for his own back by his spoiling that girl ; and the

words of that very remarkable woman seemed to be coming true. Anne was what our American brethren call a "limb." He knew that perfectly well, and had seen that every governess would not stand her; and so, at great expense, he had got the services of a placid even-tempered lady, possessed of every virtue and every accomplishment. He had told this lady that she would please to consider that her present engagement meant a provision for life. The good lady was very poor,—in fact penniless,—and very humble. But this autumn morning she had come, and, after dissolving herself into tears, had given notice that she would wish to leave that day three months.

Silcote would not accept her warning at all. He told her that his word was passed to provide for her, and put her on her honour to stay. After which he sent for Anne.

"What is this matter between you and Miss Heathton, Anne?" was his mild remonstrance, for he was afraid of her.

"What is the meaning of the fireworks on the fifth of November?" was the young lady's answer. "*I don't know. But they always come. I don't know exactly how it began. She went on exasperating me with her old-fashioned drill-sergeant notions until I couldn't stand it, and broke out. And, if my memory serves me, I was very rude and very vulgar. But I am sick of this place, and all about it. I will go and make it up with her, if you like. What are you going to do to-day? Can't you take me for a ride?*"

"I am going to ride across country to St. Mary's," said Silcote.

"Do let me come. I am so utterly weary here. I do hate this place so!"

This was to be his return, then!

"You have everything which the mind of man could possibly desire here."

"I am so bitterly lonely. I have not a soul to speak to," pouted Anne. "I am sick of the horses, and the dogs, and the peacocks and pigs, and the footmen and grooms. I wish I had been a boy, and gone to school. I wish I had been stolen by sweeps, and made to climb up chimneys. I saw a sweep yesterday, and he was laughing at something fit to split his sides. I never have anything to laugh at. Come, do take me. Get my pony ready. I can sleep with Dora."

He gave his consent, and she was soon by his side in a grey riding-habit and low-crowned hat. She was very beautiful, there was no doubt about that; but on a very small scale. They were splendidly mounted, and rode fast, having far to go. Anne was

half wild with joy and high spirits. She would sometimes lay her pretty little gloved hand on the Squire's great arm, and squeeze her thanks into him. She was clever and agreeable, and she made herself very charming to him: it was the most delightful ride either of them had ever had: long remembered.

Late in the afternoon they left the inclosures, and came on the wild silent heath. At sunset they pulled their horses on the edge of a roll in the moor, just above St. Mary's College, and looked over into the deep hollow beneath. The lake was a great crimson pool, with all the fantastic school buildings reflected in it, with the dark woodlands rising sheer behind. Lights were beginning to shine from the windows, sending long trails of reflection into the darkening water; while the hum of three hundred voices arose pleasantly on the night air, and lost itself in the solitude around.

Anne drew a breath of deep delight. "This is something *like* a place," she said.

CHAPTER XXIX.

—AND, AFTER AN EXCURSION TO DOUBTING CASTLE,—

THEIR men led the horses away to the head master's stables, and Silcote, wickedly and for fun, sending Anne perfectly alone, and with no directions, to find Algernon's lodgings, held his way towards Arthur's: looking back from time to time to see how Anne got on among the crowd of boys to whose tender mercies he had so mischievously committed her. She was not in the least embarrassed, but, drawing the skirt of her riding-habit over her left arm, she requested one of the nearest of them to go and find Mr. Sugden, and then stood perfectly still, with her whip-arm drooped at her side, not a little pleased with the astounding effect which her beauty produced. The sensation reached its climax when James appeared, and, coolly accosting her as "Anne," marched off this splendid creature to the third master's lodgings; and, having seen her in, went across the quadrangle whistling, with his hands in his pockets, perfectly unconcerned.

The Squire, entering by the principal way, found himself in the comfortable bright corridor, swarming with well-fed, well-clad youngsters: his heart warmed at the thought that no inconsiderable part of the good he saw around him was *his* doing. One of the masters whom he did not know, an amiable, grey-headed man,

was standing near him, and the Squire, in the warmth of his heart, went up to him and introduced himself.

"Your servant, sir. I am happy to have the honour of your acquaintance. I hope you find everything here quite comfortable, sir. We have hunted high and low for talent, and, by Jove, sir, we intend to induce talent to remain with us. A word to me at any time, sir, on any point, will meet with attention."

"Thank you very much," said the wondering Algernon. "I have the honour to——"

"Not at all," said the Squire, with a polite wave of the hand.

This was very disconcerting, but Algernon came at it again.

"I was about to observe that I had not the happiness. If you will allow me——"

"Certainly, certainly, certainly," said the Squire, with great good humour. "By all means."

Algernon could not help wishing that this burly old gentleman in grey breeches, butcher's boots, and a white hat, would not be quite so polite. He had to bring it out so awkwardly.

"That, in point of fact, I did not know to whom I had the honour of speaking."

"Surely not, surely not! Ha, ha! how could you? And I going on all the time supposing you could know a man you had never seen in your life. Capital! I am Silcote of Silcotes, my dear sir, where I hope to see you some of these days."

Algernon drew suddenly back, and grew pale. He had not, till this last announcement came suddenly upon him, the slightest idea that this burly old country squire in grey was his terrible old father. But he had to speak.

"My name also, sir, is the same as yours. It was the necessity of my children which drove me to this place, sir; not my own. I had intended to keep out of your way, but fate has ordered it otherwise. I only ask you to believe that our *rencontre* is as purely accidental on my part as it is on yours, and to withdraw."

Silcote was not the less thrown off his balance. He had approved (or consented to) Algernon's appointment, and had got into some corner of his brain the notion that sometimes, at the further end of a corridor, he might see a figure which avoided him. He had never wished to speak to his son, or to find him. He had been speaking to him, and had found him—had found in his son a man as grey as himself, but more bent under the pressure of the horrible secret which had ruined both their lives.

The corridor was light, and the noisy stream of boyhood was passing and repassing. The son would have gone quietly away,

but the father made a gesture to detain him. Algernon had the children to think of. The two men stood face to face under a lamp, but not looking at one another. Silcote's eyes were on the ground,—he in deep thought, and Algernon calmly watching him.

An inexorable sort of figure, and a very inexorably shaped head, was all that he saw before the Squire raised his face honestly and calmly to his, and said—

“Let us talk together.”

“Will you follow me?”

“Certainly. I cruelly let the curse descend on you when you were seventeen. I repent. I did wrong. It was a shamefully vindictive action. Since then I have heard nothing but good of you. No one has heard any good of me, God help me! You have borne this bitter curse better than I; and yet, from what I have heard of you from every mouth, you are a man who would feel it more. And you are as grey as I am. Go on, and let us talk together.”

They passed from the noise of the boys and the lights of the corridors, through the dark cloisters, towards Algernon's house. As the dark-gowned figure of Algernon passed on from shadow to shadow before Silcote on their way, ghastly doubts, followed by the faint ghost of a new-born joy, very dim and afar off as yet, passed through his soul. When they were in Algernon's well-lit study together, the Squire threw himself into a chair, and Algernon began the conversation, standing erect before the fire.

“This interview, sir, is deeply painful to both of us. There is no doubt of that. It was not of my seeking. I anticipate that you will say that I had no business to marry at all. But I married, as I thought, an heiress, and so no blame can be given me for that. Mr. Betts has doubtless explained all that to you. I am a broken and a ruined man, sir; but I ask nothing for myself; only I will kneel and cringe to you for the sake of my unhappy children.”

Silcote raised himself from his chair, slowly and solemnly, and confronted him. “Come to the light, sir, and let me see your mother's eyes once more. I know they are there, and I must see them once again before the great coming darkness, even if the sight of them kills me.”

Algernon came close to the lamp, and Silcote looked at him steadily and quietly for nearly a minute, and then said “Hah!” like a sigh, and dropped back in his chair. Algernon stood steadily where he was.

After a few moments Silcote spoke again.

“Boy, how old are you?”

"Forty-one."

"And grey. Greyer than I. But it has not killed you yet."

"Not yet, sir."

"Odd. Look at your *physique*, and look at mine. And you knowing it ever since you were seventeen! You ought to be dead, you know."

"I ought never to have been born, sir."

"And you have known it for twenty years and not died under it."

"My religion has supported me, sir."

"We will leave that alone. You, grey-headed boy, look at me again."

Algernon did so.

"I can bear those eyes now; I thought at first they would have maddened me. Boy, is there any wild chance that we have both been abused and deceived?"

"That is entirely your business, sir: the responsibility lies with you. If we are both deceived, I have been deceived through you."

"That is true again," said Silcote; "that is true. I can't stand much talk on this question. Only I ask for one thing. Don't say anything about this interview in a certain quarter."

"In which quarter, sir?"

"Bless you," said the Squire, testily; "is there more than one quarter? The head master's quarter—Arthur's quarter. Don't tell him of this, man. We have been half maddened, you and I, by this business; but I hope we have both brains enough left to know a bully when we see one: and Arthur is that. But, mind you, I love Arthur better than all the world besides, and have made him my heir. He tells you everything, I believe. How is his health?"

"His health is perfect, sir."

"You know nothing, I see. But the doctors say that those fainting fits are nothing. Do you ever hear from that vagabond villain, Tom?"

"If you mean your son Thomas, now rising in the Austrian army, I hear from him very often, sir."

"You may let me know about him on a future occasion. Now, sir, if you will do me the kindness to send for the boy Sugden, I think our interview may end. Will you shake hands?"

"Certainly, sir."

"That shake was for the sake of your children; take this pat on the shoulder for your own good self. You are a good man, sir; you are a good man. Now quick—the boy Sugden."

CHAPTER XXX.

—GETS INTO THE REGION OF UNUTTERABLE ASTONISHMENT—

THE Squire had completely changed his manner by the time that the boy Sugden appeared. The reaction from his terrible talk with Algernon had made him sarcastic and peculiar. Our old friend James appeared before him, looking horribly guilty, but very charming and handsome ; and the Squire, sitting up in his chair, began on him snarling.

“ You are a most charming boy ; you are a nice piece of goods : you will do, you will. Mr. Silcote, keep your eye on this boy : he’ll do. What do you think of yourself, sir ? Hey ? ”

James might have said that he thought a great deal of himself, but he didn’t. He only stood before the chairman, Squire Silcote, shifting from one leg to the other, looking, as the Squire afterwards told Betts, so confoundedly handsome and amiable that it was a wonder he did not throw the poker at him.

“ Silence, hey ! Is this obstinacy or stupidity ? Is this letter yours, sir ? ”

“ It is certainly mine, sir,” said James, quietly.

“ A cool proposition, that I should send you to Italy at my own expense ; and, if possible, my nephew Reginald also ! On what grounds, may I most humbly ask, do you base this most astounding demand ? ”

“ It is no demand, sir,” said James, looking frankly and slyly at him, for he had got to understand him ; “ it is only a proposition. It is generally considered to be not only a duty, but a privilege, of the rich to patronize and assist genius.”

“ Certainly,” said Silcote. “ I allow all that. Would you be so condescending as to show me your genius ? You don’t happen to have it about you, do you ? If you will meet me so far as to take your genius out of your pocket and hand it to me for inspection, I’ll begin to think about patronizing it. No more of it, sir. I’ll think over it when I’ve seen your drawings. Come with me, sir. Good-night, Mr. Silcote.”

“ So the Squire and James went away together. “ Boy,” he said, as he crossed the quadrangle, “ I will think of this Italian scheme of yours more fully ; I don’t think I shall let you go. I will examine your drawings as an amateur, and get them examined by more competent men. Unless their dictum is ‘ First-rate ’ I shall not consent. An artist of necessity dissociates himself from all ties of—of any kind whatever—and I don’t see my way to it.

Now I want to see this new matron, lady superintendent, or whatever she calls herself. Take me to her. What do the boys say about her ? ”

“ She is strict but very kind ; we are all very fond of her. I have had a sitting from her.”

“ Indeed, my young Weigall. Did you find her a study worthy of your genius ? ”

“ She has a magnificent head, and her get-up is simply superb. She is worthy of a better pencil than ever mine will be.”

“ How sweetly modest ! This must be the self-depreciation of a true genius. Is this her room ? Pray announce me.”

James, knocking at the door, was told to enter in a kindly quiet voice which attracted the Squire’s attention. They passed in together. Silcote saw before him a grey-headed woman, dressed in grey, with a long grey shawl, with her head turned away from him, bending over baskets of linen which she was sorting. She attracted his attention at once, and he began, “ I beg your pardon, madam,—” when she turned and looked at him.

Silcote was transfixed with unutterable astonishment. He burst out, “ Why, what the—— ! ” when she suddenly raised her right hand, and with her left pointed to the boy beside him. Silcote understood in a moment, as he put it to himself mentally, “ The cub has not recognised her then.” He changed his manner at once. “ Madam,” he said, “ I have come, as chairman, to have a talk with you on various matters. Are you at leisure ? ”

“ I am at leisure, sir ; at least, if you will allow me to go on with my work. When the hands are idle the memory gets busy. You have found that yourself, sir, I do not doubt.”

The Squire swung himself round towards James, and, standing squarer and broader than ever before him, pointed his finger at him, and said—

“ Go, and shut the door after you.”

Which things James did.

“ Now, my dear Mrs. Sugden,” said he, pulling up a chair, and sitting down in front of her, “ would you be kind enough to let me know the meaning of this ? ”

Certainly. First of all, how did you call me just now ? ”

“ I called you Mrs. Sugden.”

“ That is not my name. It *was*, and is still, that of my half-brother, who passed for my husband when I lived in your little cottage at Beechwood ! but it is not mine.”

“ Your half-brother ? ” said Silcote. “ Was not Sugden your husband, then ? ”

“ No, only half-brother. His mother was not the same as

mine. Our common father, a twenty-acre freeholder in Devonshire, married twice. The name of his first wife, of my brother's mother, was Coplestone; the name of his second wife, *my* mother, was Lee."

"Then how shall I call you? Mrs. Morgan?"

"Not at all. A mere *nom de guerre*, which I assumed when they objected to the title I bore at St. Peter's, 'Sister Mary.' Nothing more than that."

"Then perhaps, madam, to facilitate conversation, you would put me in possession of your style and titles."

"I am Mrs. Thomas Silcote, your unworthy, but dutiful daughter-in-law," she said very quietly.

The Squire fell back in his chair. "Don't regard me, my dear madam; I have the constitution of a horse. If I had not, I should have been in Bedlam, or the grave years ago. Let us have it out, madam. I thought there were Silcotes enough encumbering the face of the earth. There don't happen to be any more of you, I suppose?"

"There is James, you know," said Mrs. Thomas Silcote, smiling. "He makes another. I don't think there are any more."

"Quite so," said Silcote. "James. I begin to collect myself. James, then, is my lawful grandson?"

"Most certainly. Do you desire proofs?"

"Not if you assert it. You yourself are a standing proof of every proposition that comes out of your mouth."

"I was a labourer's daughter," said Mrs. Thomas. "A twenty-acre freeholder is a labourer, is he not?"

"I don't believe a word of it," said Silcote.

"I thought you were bound to believe everything I said a minute ago?"

"Don't fence with me. It is not fair. You utterly ruin my nerves, and then begin what these low boys here call 'chaffing.' Will you explain to me how all this came about?"

"Not to-night."

"You really must in part. How on earth did you come here?"

"Merely by answering an advertisement."

"Does Betts know nothing?"

"Not a word. It is all between you and me. And it must remain there."

"How was it that the boy did not recognise you?"

"Time, time, time!"

"Silcote sat perfectly silent. 'Time works wonders,' he said,

at last. "You wanted to see him, I suppose, and you risked his recognising you?"

"See him!" said Mrs. Silcote. "I wanted to touch him, I wanted to kiss him; but I cannot do that. Do you remember, one day in your garden, pointing out to me that it would be a drawback to the boy if his low parentage was known?"

"I do. God forgive me if I did wrong."

"You did right: even speaking from what you knew then. I know you, Silcote, as a good and kind man, though you have tried hard to sell yourself to the evil one. And so I tell you this: that I have doubts in my utter ignorance, whether the world would take my marriage to be a legal one; and, therefore, I have remained unknown to the boy."

"Where, and how, were you married?"

"In Scotland." And she told him the particulars.

"Bless the woman!" he exclaimed. "You are as much my daughter-in-law as if you had been married in St. George's, Hanover Square, with eighteen bridesmaids. I wish I had known this. Once more, will you tell me the whole story?"

"Not to-night."

"There is no reason against your letting the boy know who you are."

"Let it be—let it be. The father is outlawed, and the mother's claim cannot be quite proved. It would be a disadvantage to the boy. And hear me, you Dark Squire, with your bloodhounds. The boy has got to love me again, with a new fresh love overlying the mere old love which lives in his memory. He has been painting my face, and the new love showed itself in his eyes a hundred times."

"Was there no recognition?"

"A dim stirring of memory only, which made him more strangely beautiful than ever. Once or twice there was such a fixed stare in his glorious eyes that I thought I was betrayed. But I was not. It was only the old love of memory wedding itself to the new love of respect and admiration. Would you be loved better than that?"

"Confound the woman!" said the Squire to himself, and then sat quite silent—she going on mending shirts.

At last he said, "The boy wants to go to Italy and study art. I have had bother enough with Italy, but I won't stand in his way. I recognise him as my grandson, and I like the boy. But is there any promise in these drawings of his? We must not make a fool of the lad. I have seen nothing of his as yet."

Mrs. Silcote rose, and brought from a bureau a small canvass

with a head, painted in oils, upon it. It was the likeness of herself which James had done. She said—

“Will that do?”

“Do!” said Silcote, “I should think it would. There is genius in every line of it.”

“So I thought, thinking at the same time that I might be blinded by my love. Let him go, Silcote. Did you ever know what it was to love, Silcote?—not to love with the old love and the new love with which my boy and I love one another; but to love blindly and foolishly, from an instinct more powerful than reason? I loved so once, and believed myself loved still more deeply in return; and one fine day, I found that I had never been loved at all, and had only been tricked and deceived by words sweet as angels, falser than devils. I found that out one day, Silcote, and my heart withered utterly up within me. And I was desperate and mad, and only saved from the river by a gentle brother, who believed me lost—in one sense of the word. And he and I went back to the fields and the fallows, and fought nature for bread together, as we had been used to do when we were children together, and when mine was only a child’s beauty.”

A very long silence, during which she sat as calm as Memnon.

When she found her voice again, she went on—

“Do you begin to understand me? Are you capable of understanding the case of one who would have given up everything in this world, ay, and God forgive me if I blaspheme—would have given up all hopes in the next, for the love of one being, and then found that that love never existed at all?—that she had been a dupe and a fool from the first, and that, even while his hand was in her hair, he was laughing at her? I went through this, and did not die. Could you dare to warrant the same for yourself?”

A very long pause here. Buttons stitched on shirts, and shirts dextrously folded and placed away, Silcote sitting with his hands before his eyes the whole time. At last he spoke.

“You speak of my son Thomas, whom I loved once. Do you love him still?”

“I cannot say,” she answered. “Do you?”

“And I cannot say either,” replied Silcote.

“He is your son,” she urged.

“And he is the father of yours,” he replied.

“You have the quickness of your family in answer,” she said.

“Leave this question.”

“You have told me part of your story, and I will not ask for details to-night. You ask me if I know what it is to awake from a dream of love, and find that that love never existed. I do!

May I tell you my story? I have gone through all that you speak of, and am still alive. Men with my frame and my brain don't die, or go mad. But I warn you solemnly that, if you allow me to tell you my story, you must prepare your nerves. It is so ghastly, so inconceivable, so unutterably horrible, that I can only hope that the telling of it to you will not kill me."

"You have been abused, Squire. And, may I ask, have you never told it before? The High Church people, among whom I have been lately, and who have done me good—although I don't go with them, I will allow that—urge confession. It is capable of any amount of abuse, this confession: but, looking at it in the light of merely a confidential communication of a puzzling evil, it generally does good. You have, with your jealous reticence, kept some great evil to yourself for many years, I fear. Why have you never told it before?"

"Why?—Temper, I suppose. I seem like the Ancient Mariner. I can't tell my story to any one whose face does not invite me; and your face was the first one which ever did invite me."

"Then, Silcote, let me hear this story of yours."

And so Silcote told his story.

CHAPTER XXXI.

—AND THEN, HAVING MADE CONFESSION, BUT GETTING NO
ABSOLUTION—

"I WAS, my dear Mrs. Sugden, an ambitious, handsome young fellow,—very popular; with an intention of enjoying life, and in every way fitted for enjoying it. I was sole heir to a very large fortune; and, beside that, came from a family of attorneys: another fortune. No part of my scheme was idleness or luxury. I believed myself to have (nay, I had) considerable talent, not a mean share of wit, and a ready tongue; and I determined—don't laugh at a shipwrecked man—to follow my career as a barrister until I sat upon the bench. My family connexions started me very quickly in a fine practice; but bless you, I could have made my fortune without *them*. Ask any of my contemporaries. I am only telling you the plain truth, I assure you. Who am *I* that I should boast?

"I suppose that at twenty-five I was one of the most fortunate men that ever lived. With my talents and knowledge of law, I would have booked myself for six or seven thousand a year by my practice at forty. I loved my profession intensely; I was a lawyer in my very blood, and all that fate asked of me was to go on and make a noble fortune by the pursuit I loved best in the whole world. And I must marry, too: and a young lady, beautiful, well-born, rich, and highly educated, was ready to marry me. And she had ninety thousand pounds of her own.

"Did I love her or her money? No, I loved her, my dear madam, ever since she was a child. And she loved me at one time. Look at me."

Mrs. Thomas Silcote looked at him very steadily indeed.

"Do I look mad?"

"No," she said very quietly; "you look perfectly sane."

"Hah!" said Silcote. "And yet I sit here and tell you as a solemn truth, that I *know* that at one time she did love me."

"I have no doubt she did. You had better go on," said Mrs. Thomas Silcote.

"I loved her when she was a child; more deeply yet when I was courting her; still more deeply as a bride; until my whole soul merged into hers as a wife. There never was a woman loved as that woman was by me."

"Well?"

"My sister Mary, whom you know as the Princess, had been a great deal in Italy, principally at Venice, and a great deal also in Vienna; for, next to Italian life, she loved the free and easy life of South Germany. My wife had a son, Algernon, now a master in this very college, and was a long time in recovering her health afterwards. The doctor strongly recommended a change of air and scene.

"At this conjunction of circumstances, my sister came back to England from Italy or Austria (she was always travelling between the two), and, finding my wife in ill health, proposed to take her to Florence to spend the winter. I was loth to part with my darling, still more loth to let her go with my foolish sister. But the doctors were all for it, and old Miss Raylock (you know her) was going also, and so I consented. It was term time, and I could not follow them for six weeks. I let her go, against my better judgment.

"For I knew my sister well. She is one of the most foolish and silly women that ever walked the earth. And she is very untruthful withal: but probably her most remarkable quality is her perfectly donkeyish obstinacy. Like most weak and foolish

women, she has a love of mystery and of mysterious power, and she had got herself, before this, mixed up in an infinity of Austro-Italian plots, having no idea of their merits, but getting herself made a fool of alternately by both parties. I had argued with her on this matter often, but you might as well have argued with the pump. She believed herself trusted by both parties, whereas the fact was that she was merely used as a disseminator of false intelligence.

"When term was over, I followed them to Italy. The state of things which I found there was deeply displeasing to me. I found a coterie of English living in a free and easy manner in one another's houses; the leading members of which were my sister, Miss Raylock, a certain Sir Godfrey Mallory, and my wife. My wife and Miss Raylock seemed to be the only people who were living in the least degree up to the English standard of propriety, as it went in those days. As for my sister, she had succeeded in surrounding the whole party with all the political scum of Europe, as it seemed to me. I never saw such a parcel of cut-throat villains, before or since, as were gathered every evening in my sister's house: nay, not only in my sister's house, but in my wife's—that is, my own. I wondered how they dared assemble there, and expected a descent of police immediately. There were two people about my sister, however, to whom I took a stronger objection than to any other two. The one was a man at that time acting as her major-domo, a German, called Kriegsthurm; the other was my late brother-in-law, the Prince of Castelnuovo.

"How they were allowed to talk the rank sedition they did was a puzzle to me. I am, like most Englishmen, perfectly liberal, rather seditious, about foreign politics, but they seemed to me to be going rather too far. I found the truth out though, one night when I had retired from their intolerable jargon, and was smoking my cigar at a *café*. A very gentlemanly and quiet young man drew his chair near mine, and entered into conversation. I took a great fancy to the man, and we exchanged names when we parted. What the deuce was it? A Roman name, I remember. Colonna?—Orsini?—No—but a Roman name."

"Not Frangipanni?"

"The same. How strange!"

"He is our new Italian teacher: he comes down twice a week by rail if he can get a class. One of Betts's men, that is all. The ghosts are rising, Silcote."

"So it seems. Well, this man and I entered into close conversation, and he told me the history of the state of society up at my sister's villa. It was a house watched by the police for

political purposes,—the Dionysius's Ear of the police. The people who assembled there were either spies or fools, with two exceptions.

"I asked him for those two exceptions, and the man was frank and gentleman-like with me. The exceptions he named were, strange to say, the very two men to whom I had taken such a great dislike—the Prince of Castelnuovo, and that very queer German Kriegsturm.

"He went on in French, 'I put my liberty in your hands, Monsieur. Why? I cannot say. But I am a patriot, and those two men are faithful patriots. For me I never go to Miladi Silcote's house. I am on my good behaviour. I do not wish to be suspect. I receive the prince, and also Kriegsturm, at my own, where my beautiful little wife, also a patriot, entertains. But go to Miladi Silcote's, no. To Miss Raylock's but little now. Their patriotism is advanced, but they are indiscreet. Sir Godfrey Mallory also is indiscreet in my opinion. My wife does not receive Sir Godfrey. I do not allow my wife to receive him!'

"Daughter-in-law, that was the first bite of the serpent. I knew that my wife had had one proposal before mine, and that the proposer had been Sir Godfrey Mallory. I knew that."

"And also that she had refused him," said Mrs. Thomas Silcote, cheerily.

"Certainly. But here he was again, and they were living so very fast and loose. All Leicester Square round them—and—and—I can't go on."

"You must go on to the end," said Mrs. Thomas Silcote. "Now?"

"I sulked with her," went on Silcote in a low voice. "Not in words about that man; though I was jealous, I did not dare to do that. Besides, I could not. I suppose I must tell. I took her home, but my sister and her precious major-domo, Kriegsturm, came too. And Sir Godfrey Mallory followed us. And I sulked with her all the time: though I loved her—oh woman! woman! you can't dream of my intense devoted love for that wife of mine!"

There was a long pause. He could not go on, and she would not speak.

"We were never the same to one another after this. I loved her as deeply as ever, but the devil had come between us, and would not go. I thought she had been indiscreet, and could not forget it. I sulked with her, and was persistently hard with her. If I begin thinking of the beautiful quiet little ways and actions

by which she tried to win me back, I shall go out of my mind at last, after all these years. When you have heard all, you will think me a madman for solemnly declaring this: that even now, after all is over, I would give all my expectations on this side of the grave—ay, and on the other also—to have her back even as she was at the very last. I may have been unkind to her, God forgive me; but no man ever so wholly gave up his soul to a woman, as I did to her, until that fatal night at Exeter.”

“Your mind is diseased, Silcote,” said Mrs. Thomas. “You have been abused. My instinct tells me so.”

“I guessed at the same thing to-night, when I saw her son; but listen. My theory always has been till lately, that I tired out her patience—that I turned her into a fiend by my own temper. But I had proofs. I struck Sir Godfrey Mallory (for he and my sister had followed me there to Exeter again, two years or more after my suspicions had begun), and then sat down to my briefs. The last proof came next morning, but I went into court as gay as ever to defend a sailor boy for murder. And, when the excitement of it was over, I turned into the man I am now and ever shall be. Can you conceive this? A love so deep, so wild, so strong, so jealous as mine, for one who is still, after all—ay, hear me here—dearer to me than all life? Can you conceive this, and hear what follows?”

“What proofs had you? Proofs against your wife? Against Sir Godfrey Mallory?”

His face was livid as he spoke, but he found words to utter the terrible secret.

“Worse than that. I had a letter telling me where to look for poison; and I looked and found it. But I never told her what I knew. I took her back to Italy, and she died there in a year. She never knew it. I was as mute as a stone to her. I was never unkind to her; but I never spoke to her; and she tried every beautiful little winning way of hers,—each one of which now, when memory is aroused, scorches my heart like fire,—to win me back. And I was cold stone to her. And she died, and her last look at me was one of love and forgiveness, and puzzled wonder at our estrangement. And memory of it all was dying out under the influence of time, and I thought I was forgetting all about it, until to-night I saw her son, and knew that I loved her better than ever. So now, instead of oblivion, there comes a new-born remorse. Do you want more?”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Thomas Silcote, boldly. “Where is this letter which condemned her? Have you got it?”

“Do not go too far with me. I keep it in a box in my

bedroom, and every night a devil comes and dances on that box, and I watch him. Leave me alone, woman; I may get dangerous."

"Not you. Is this all you have to tell me?"

"Enough, surely, I should think."

The tall grey figure rose on him in contempt and anger. "Then this, sir, is the miserable and ridiculous lie, with which you have been maddening yourself for thirty years! Have you believed this for all that time, and not died? Shame on you! shame, Silcote! Is it on such grounds as these that you have killed a most unhappy and ill-used lady, by your wicked jealousy and suspicion? Listen to me, sir. You are getting old, and your life may be too short for the work; but don't dare to die, don't dare to face the judgment, until every word of this wicked lie is refuted; and this poor lady's memory is avenged. Don't argue with me. It is a falsehood, sir, from beginning to end. Do you not see it now?"

"If it is," said Silcote, "and I begin to believe so, what room is there for me on the earth or in heaven, or elsewhere?"

"Right it, and ask the question afterwards. Go."

Silcote never went near Arthur's house that night. A solitary poacher, in Bramshill Park, lurking in one of the northern glens a little after midnight, heard a sound different from the fitful sighing of the night-wind in the fir-trees, and, before he had time to make out that it was a horse's feet brushing swiftly through the heather, saw a horseman pass him at full speed, and hold away north-east, and believed ever afterwards that he had seen a ghost. The grooms at Silcotes were knocked up at half-past one, amidst the baying of the bloodhounds, and found their master in the yard, looking stranger and "darker" than ever. But he apologised very gently to them for the trouble he had given them so late at night, and said that his return had been quite unforeseen. James's friend, the young servant, coming sleepily down to answer the kicking at one of the back doors, made by the groom, and believing his master to be miles away, was sulkily facetious when he opened it, and then was stricken to stone at finding himself face to face with the Squire. But the Squire was very gentle, and the young man, sitting up wearily, lest his inexorable master might want something before he went to bed, had to stop up until morning.

For the Squire, with eyebrows knitted deeper than ever, and with his hands close clasped before him, walked up and down the old hall till broad day.

CHAPTER XXXII.

GOES HOME, AND LEAVES ARTHUR TO ENJOY HIS SHARE OF
ASTONISHMENT.

THE boys had been a little time back, and Arthur had sorted them into new classes, and had been tremendously busy. The general opinion of the boys was, that they didn't like him: which was extremely natural. It was part of his plan (for he had achieved the art of schoolmastering from second-hand, and had even bought Arnold's "Life and Letters") to watch and study the character of each boy most carefully; and see which was to be treated with geniality, and which with severity, and so forth. Poor don! As clever as he could be, wanting only one thing, genius; and believing that he could be genial, and could attract a boy's confidence by line and rule. The boys did not like him even in these early busy times, and got cordially to hate him afterwards, in spite of his inexorable justice, generally a quality which boys appreciate greatly. Arthur's geniality was Birmingham, and the boys knew it. Algernon was often unjust, and sometimes mislaid his temper now; Betts was at furious war with them all on every conceivable subject; but they loved Betts and Algernon, and they never could endure Arthur. But I must go back to the third day after the first meeting.

He was tired with his work, and he felt need for some relaxation. Music was his favourite relaxation, and he determined to have some music. The anthem on the very first Sunday was not to his taste, and he thought that he could find some one who could please him better than the organist. He put on his cap, and went across to his brother's lodgings.

On opening his brother's study door, which opened out of the cloisters, he only found Miss Dora, as sedate as you please, quite alone, sewing before the fire.

"Good evening, uncle," she said. A sentence which is hardly worth the paper it is written on. A sentence so unmeaning that an editor might justly object to its being "set up;" but worth writing down, if one could only give the emphasis. At all events, there was an emphasis about it somewhere; I should say not far from the first *e* in evening, which made Arthur say to himself, that she was a very saucy and forward girl.

But he could override and put down, by sheer disregard, all forms of sauciness. He merely asked her contemptuously—

"Fetch Miss Lee to me, will you? Tell her I want her."

"I doubt if she would come to you, *now*," said Dora, coolly. "Besides, it is too late to start for London."

"Is she not here? Is she in London?"

"I can't say," said Dora, going on with her work. "She dates her letters to me from her house in Curzon Street, Mayfair: rather too near the Farm Street Mews Chapel to suit my Protestantism. I wish she lived further away from it. Did you ever go there, uncle?"

"Farm Street Mews Chapel? No."

"You should. Splendid mass, uncle. One of the best masses you can hear in London. Miss Lee took me there in the summer, while I was staying with her; it was really as fine as that sort of thing can be. Thanks to your instructions in music, Miss Lee was thoroughly able to appreciate it. I am afraid she will go to Rome, though; in fact, I thought she had gone, but found she had been stopped at rather more than three-quarters of the way by some extremely High Church people. Still I wish she did not live quite so handy to Farm Street. I was in hopes you were going to marry her," continued this *demoiselle terrible*; "you might have kept her on our side of the border."

"Don't talk nonsense, Dora. I will not permit it."

Miss Herbert might possibly, after some of her conscientious study, say, "Certainly not," as demurely as Dora said it. For, poor me, I have only to write it down.

"Has Miss Lee left you, and got a situation in Curzon Street, Mayfair?" asked Arthur.

"She has left us, certainly. But I am inclined to doubt whether, now she has come into her property, she would take another situation as governess."

"Then it is enough to keep her? I heard she had come in for a small legacy, but I have neither time nor inclination for details."

"It is certainly enough to keep her," said Dora, quietly and sarcastically; "that is to say, if she makes it go as far as it ought. And it *may* be doubled."

"Tell me all about it, Dora. I am getting interested."

"I thought you were interested in her before. It is a great pity that she has got into the hands of these ultra-High Church people. It was my father's fault partly, I will allow. But you had great influence over her once, uncle; why did you not keep it up? I fear greatly that all her fortune present and prospective will get ultimately into the hands of the papists."

"Her fortune? Has she got a fortune? I have heard nothing. I thought she was with you."

"I don't know what you call a fortune," said Dora, maliciously. "I will tell you all I know. There are a vast number of Lees in Devonshire, and the king of all the Lees, Mr. Lee of Basset, has died without a male heir, and has bequeathed his great property to the two female heirs in his line; one of whom is Miss Lee."

"Good heavens!" said Arthur.

"The other happens strangely to be a woman I remember perfectly well,—James's mother."

"Who is 'James,' in the name of goodness?" said Arthur.

"Never mind now. I thought you knew him. Your memory is short, uncle."

"Never mind my memory. Go on."

"Certainly. They have found Miss Lee, and she has got her money; but they can't find James's mother. As far as we can make out, if they don't find Mrs. Sugden the whole of it will go to Miss Lee. I know nothing about the terms of the will; but, as far as I can gather, if Mrs. Sugden does not turn up, Miss Lee, instead of having four thousand a year, will have eight. It is a good deal of money, is it not, uncle?"

"Four thousand a year! The girl is mad."

"Miss Lee, you mean. I think she is quite mad myself; as mad as a hatter or a March hare, to get in with those extreme High Church people. Mind, I know nothing about the law of the case, uncle; only Miss Lee has got *her* four thousand a year, and seems to me in the very jaws of popery."

Next morning Arthur, with a dour face, set to at a work which he had laid out for himself—that of examining the lower classes in order. An unhappy but ingenious and poetical boy freely construed "*Trahuntque siccæ machinæ carinas*" by "The bathing machines drag down the sick people to the careening harbour."

Arthur lost his temper, and banged the boy over the head with a Valpy's Horace. Miss Lee, with four thousand a year, and on the verge of Rome! Bless the boy, it's a wonder he hadn't killed him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE PRINCESS DEPARTS SOUTHWARD.

SILCOTE, in the astonishment produced by meeting with Algernon so suddenly, and by finding his own daughter-in-law in that remarkable woman who had been living so long close to his park-gates, rode back to Silcotes from St. Mary's in a state of extreme confusion. His confusion lasted through the night, which he spent in walking up and down the hall; and as night grew into morning the confusion remained, and had superadded to it an ever-growing terror.

He had told Mrs. Thomas Silcote the truth. "The memory of it was dying out until to-night I saw *her* son, and knew that I loved her better than ever; so now, instead of oblivion, there comes a new-born remorse."

This was all true. It was easily hinted at to Algernon in the sudden shock of their accidental and awkward meeting; it was easily spoken of in his tragical passionate talk with his newly-found daughter-in-law. The talk about it was easy; but the plain, hard result, now that he was alone in the solitary house, was terrible, and the terror grew as he paced up and down.

If he *had* been abused; if his evil suspicious temper *had*, after all, killed the gentlest, kindest woman who ever lived; if all those sweet little arts of hers which she had used upon him, to bring him back to her, had not been the wiles of a would-be murderess, but the gentle trusting arts of a tender wife, only wondering at the cause of his estrangement;—what room was there left for him on earth, or elsewhere? Once or twice on the previous day he had felt a kind of new joy at the hope that his first wife's innocence might be proved: now, when his daughter-in-law had said out roundly, and even furiously, that she believed him mistaken, he began to see the frightful consequences to himself if his dead wife's character were ever cleared up. There was no place for him anywhere. Those gentle, wondering, inquiring eyes of his murdered wife would haunt him to the grave, and beyond it.

His second wife, the mother of Thomas, Arthur, and Evelyn, had been always a mere cipher to him. They had never cared much for one another. Silcote was not a man who could love twice, and she was a woman whom he had married in spite. She had borne him children, and, having done that, had died: and the bill for her monument was 187/ 10s. 8d.—probably the most

noticeable fact in her history. A foolish woman, not even gifted with a temper; whom even her own children vilipended. She thought once, and thought always, that she had done a fine thing in marrying Silcote; and indeed he was very kind to her. *Requiescat*. Her existence had been calmly lymphatic and her memory always dim; the sort of woman who required a very expressive tombstone to keep her within human memory at all. Now, to the villagers she existed no longer, except through her tombstone. She was to them represented by nearly two hundred pounds' worth of granite. They had seldom seen her. She had been nothing to them, but they were proud of her, because her tomb was one of the few sights of the place. She had been little more to Silcote himself at any time, and now such memory as he had of her was lost and obscured in the memory of his first wife.

"Have you got that letter?" the woman had asked. And he had answered that it was in a box in his bedroom, and that a devil came and danced on it every night. He had not looked into that box for years, and it was upstairs in his bedroom even now. There were many letters in that box, *the* letter among others. At one time he nearly gained courage to go to his room and burn the box, but his courage failed. The little devil which always danced on that box in the dark waking hours of the night would be dancing now, fiercely and triumphantly.

He wanted to believe her innocence, and he wanted to believe her guilt. If she was guilty, all the beautiful old recollections of the wife as she was, at least at one time, were the delusions of an exceptionally wicked devil. If she was innocent, he was himself one for whom there was no ascertained place. Action and reaction tearing the miserable man's soul to pieces, went on through the night: at one time he determined to move heaven and earth to prove her guilty, at another time an old-forgotten spring of tenderness would gush up and mount to his heart, but never to his eyes. Hysterical tears, which sometimes give relief, were impossible to a man of his iron constitution; prayer, from long desuetude, had become impossible also.

Those who could have helped him were far away. His beloved Arthur, prig and *doctrinaire*, as he called him, was a sensible man and a Christian, and could have done something for him. Algy, whom he considered as half a Romanist, could have helped him too. Betts—why Betts would have been much better than nobody; Betts, with his realism, would have torn this ghastly web of soul-excruciating self-examination to pieces in a moment, and they could have had up a magnum of the Château Margaux, and

finished with *solvuntur risu tabulae*. Even that strange grey woman, his daughter-in-law, who had said such bitter fierce words to him that night,—*she* would have been better than utter isolation. Her sharp caustic bitter words had not stung deeply at first, but the burn was beginning to tingle now; and in his present mood he hated her, because he feared she was right. Yet he would sooner have fought her point by point than be left to madden his soul alone in the dark hall, amidst all his accumulated luxury.

Then the horrid wheel of thought went round again. *Where* was she, innocent or guilty? *Could* the soul be mortal? If immortal, was there any possibility of a meeting? and so on. At one time dreading to meet her again; at another wishing to do so to learn the truth, at another longing, with his whole soul, to see her once again beyond the grave, that, even if the worst were true, they might explain all things to one another, and after that go hand in hand through the great eternity together.

They might well, these agricultural boors, call him Dark Squire Silcote. Their simple superstitious tact seldom gives a bad nickname to any man. They were right enough here. Silcote was in utterly Egyptian darkness this night. Nothing left him just now, to connect him with other men, but a blind old tenderness for a woman. And he had believed for many years that that woman had wished to murder him. Evil and good were fighting for him; and, when evil for a time got the the upper hand, Silcote's mood was darker than ever, and the memory of his wife was put aside to spare himself the remorse which would be his fate were the terrible story of her guilt proved to be a lie.

He was in the blackest mood of all at day-dawn, when the mere physical habit of years made him leave the hall and go towards his bath-room. He had believed himself to be alone in the house with the servants; till, coming into a long gallery, he saw approaching him his sister the Princess, beautifully dressed in silk, seal-skin, and sable, worth to the buyers of old clothes a thousand pounds as she stood.

Her first look was of surprise, her second one of unutterable terror. For before her, in the dim light of the morning, stood her brother, firmly planted in her path. She looked on that square stern figure, that grey head, and those black eyebrows, for one instant, and then she began to whimper, and dropped her muff.

“Pick that thing up—it cost a hundred guineas, I know—and come here.”

She made a feeble effort to reach towards her muff, but it was a failure. Her beautiful little hands, the quivering of which could be seen under the perfectly-fitting French gloves, were first spread

abroad in an attitude of terror, and then brought together in an attitude of prayer. She went down on her knees, and said, "Brother! brother! don't murder me. I will swear I never knew it till lately, and that I am innocent."

"Get up, and don't be a fool. What do you know about this business? And where are you going?"

"I know nothing about any business at all. But if you look *farouche* at me like that, you will kill me. He has been extorting money from me again. Mercy, brother, mercy!"

The Squire's purpose was utterly changed, and an explanation indefinitely postponed. Kriegsthurm was bullying the Princess for money, and the Squire thought it must be his son Thomas. His better nature prevailed. He said—

"He has no right to serve you like this. Is he in debt again?"

"He is making a fortune; and making it out of me. Brother, I will explain everything."

"No need, my poor sister. How much does he want?"

"Two hundred pounds. And I have so many calls upon me. Brother, I will tell you everything——"

"Let be. I have had enough for one night. I will give you a cheque if you will come to my study. Tell the rascal to mind what he is about. I can forgive seventy times seven, but not seven hundred thousand times seven. I shall not go to bed. Tell the servants to bring the letters to me here in my study. Now, kiss me, sister, and go your ways."

"Good-bye, brother."

"And good-bye, also, sister. When will you be back?"

"I am not certain."

"Shall I wait dinner?"

"No; I think not."

"Don't be such a fool, sister."

"In what way?"

"Generally."

"I am as God made me," said the poor Princess, and went her ways. It was a long time before she darkened the doors of Silcote again, and when she did, the darkness of the shadow on her mind was darker than the shadow which she threw across the threshold.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SQUIRE SEES THAT HE HAS ONCE MORE OVERREACHED
HIMSELF.

THERE were no letters of consequence by the morning post, and Silcote went about his farm that day. He missed Anne very much, and wished for company of any sort. The horrible night he had passed was still horrible in recollection, even in broad daylight. He had always had a sneaking fear of his reason giving way under solitude and isolation, and he was full of that terror now. He was getting hardly plagued for his sins, and was in terror lest he should lose his reason in the plaguing. Of God's mercy he had no idea ; in God's vengeance he believed, like a devil, and trembled.

He was alone in his great house ; utterly alone. His bloodhounds, the most evil of all his evil fancies, were baying in their yard. His maids and footmen were swarming about the house, from butler to steward's room boy ; from housekeeper to still-room maid, putting all things in their old English order—for nothing. His grooms were merry over their beautiful horses, exchanging jokes and hopes in which he had no part. His bailiffs and his labourers were abroad over his farm, taking far more interest in the sowing of the seed, and the breaking of the clay, from which they could get no profit, than did the Squire himself. And he—the lord and master of it all, the mainspring of the whole great useless machine—stood utterly alone, without one soul to speak to on equal terms ; and with a bitter terror gnawing at his heart ; an ageing man, with a wasted life behind him, a newly-arisen memory threatening to kill him ; and only hoping for death as an extinction of consciousness. Not a creature near him. He was not one who could sit with his grooms—old habit was too strong for that. Yet, if one of them could only have exchanged words with him, he would have been glad. But he went into the stable-yard, and their voices were hushed at once. The smallest stable-boy had only to glance at the Squire, to see that he was in his darkest mood : they went on with their work carefully, and in silence. Little did they dream that the darkest hour is just before the dawn. Silcote would have given a hundred guineas for a kind word from any of them. But as he had sowed so he must reap. He had sown temper, and he reaped silence and solitude.

He was alone in the house. At least so he thought, in his selfish forgetfulness. But early in the afternoon he was standing

in the flower-garden, behind a Deodara, when he noticed that there was a difficulty with one of the window-doors which opened from the breakfast-room into the garden. Some one was trying to undo it from the inside, with a view to coming out. At first the window was pushed at the top and pulled at the bottom, then it was pulled at the top and pushed at the bottom. Then the person inside discovered that it was bolted, and withdrew the bolt; after which the window came open by the run, and there was some kind of accident inside, which sounded as though some one had fallen over two or three chairs, and had likewise broken something in the nature of china. Lastly, Silcote, watching the now open window with great curiosity, saw come out of it a mild little lady in goloshes, and recognised Anne's governess, Miss Heathton.

He looked forward with great eagerness to this chance of getting away from himself; and advanced towards her with alacrity and politeness. She would have fled, had there been time, but he was too near to her when she saw him, and she had to strike her colours, and submit.

"A fine day, Miss Heathton," said the Squire.

"A very fine day, indeed, sir."

It was nothing of the kind, being a perfect brute of a November day; but it did to open the conversation.

"I have relieved you of your pupil for a few days, Miss Heathton: you shall have a little peace."

"I am glad my dear pupil should have some change. I should have little difficulty with her, I think, if she saw more society."

"It shall be as you wish," said Silcote, wishing almost madly to conciliate *some* one. "You have travelled?"

"All over Europe."

"Should you consider it as a part of our contract to travel with Anne?"

"I will do so with the deepest pleasure."

"Good. I will set about it. I have a carriage which I think will do. If I find it won't I will buy a new one. And now where would you like to go? What do you say to the Holy Land, now, to begin with? You are a very religious woman, it would just suit you."

"My dear sir! so sudden. You take away my breath."

"Find it again. What do you say to the Nile, or Norway, or Jan Mayen's Land, or the Cape of Good Hope, or Boulogne?"

"I should think Boulogne to begin with, sir."

"So I should think also. How perfectly your ideas chime with mine! What a sensible woman you must be! Yes, I would

begin at Boulogne, or Calais, if you prefer, and work through France into Italy. You might get to Rome for the Holy Week, but don't keep the girl in Rome after Easter. Come north as the spring gets on."

"Your wishes shall be attended to in every respect, sir. May I make a suggestion?"

"Madam, you are here to make suggestions, and I to attend to them."

"Then may I remark that the Holy Week at Rome is a somewhat dangerous trial for a young and impulsive girl like Anne, who has been kept so closely secluded from the world?"

"Dangerous! I have been at it and never saw any danger. Except in the illuminations of the dome, and that is done by convicts, and, by the by, is not in the Holy Week at all."

"She is very impetuous; and, according to your desire, I have only given her the most ordinary religious education. I think there is a danger of her being dangerously attracted by the Romish ceremonial."

"I have forgotten all about these things. I understand you to mean that she would be likely to turn Papist?"

"That is certainly my meaning. She has never seen any form of ceremonialism in religion yet, and will be very likely, as far as I dare judge from her very eager nature, to be dangerously attracted by the externals of the lowest form of Christianity; the Romish."

"There spoke the governess,—I beg pardon; I want to be civil to you, and induce you to be my companion for the day. But other girls go to Rome and don't turn Romanist; why should she?"

"She has not been treated as girls usually are. She has been mewed up here too long (forgive my boldness). Anne is a girl of great mental activity, and of great determination. The only outlet she has ever had for that mental activity has been leading me the life of a dog. She is not amiable, Mr. Silcote. She is far from amiable." (Miss Heathton lost her very little temper, a very little bit, just here.) "I never thought that I should have gained courage to tell you this, but you are different to-day from what I have ever seen you before. And Anne is not amiable, Mr. Silcote. Far from it."

Miss Heathton had found out, like a true woman, that Silcote was in a bullyable mood, and nailed her little colours to her weak little mast.

"Well," growled Silcote, "I have heard all that before. She is a Turk. I will allow that; but what makes you think she will turn Papist?"

"I think, sir, that it is extremely probable with a girl like her, who has been kept here without any sphere whatever for her great mental activity; not to mention her obstinacy and ill-temper: that such a girl will find in the first decent form of religion, which she comes across, an outlet for her great——"

"Obstinacy and ill-temper," growled out Silcote. "Well, and a good job too. Let the girl turn Papist if she pleases: as long as she don't bring the priests into the house. Let her turn Papist. According to your own Protestant confession, it would give her an outlet for her obstinacy and ill-temper, which I am sure is very much wanted. Let her turn Papist; it is no sort of consequence to me."

Miss Heathton paused for a few moments before she had her *ultimatum* ready; then, with as much dignity as can be shown by a lady in goloshes, she drew herself up, and presented it.

"Mr. Silcote, I beg to renew the warning I gave you a few days ago,—as far as my memory will serve me, the day before yesterday. I cannot any longer remain in the establishment of a gentleman who has proved that all forms of religion are a matter of utter indifference to him. Of morality I say nothing."

"Who on earth asked you?" said the exasperated Silcote. "Am I to keep my head in an everlasting beehive for the rest of my life? Is there to be no peace for me at all? Arthur bullies me, Anne bullies me, Betts bullies me. Algernon turns his pale face and grey head upon me, and says that if things have gone wrong it is entirely my fault, and that I am answerable for everything. The woman Sugden turns on me and worries me like a cat-a-mountain, and now my very granddaughter's governess has taken up the tune, and gives me warning because she won't say anything on the 'score of morality.' Did I understand you aright, madam?"

"My words were, sir, that I would say nothing on the score of morality. My complaint is that of indifferentism in religion. Indifferentism in religion becomes, in extreme cases, a moral fault. When I alluded to morality, I merely alluded to that."

"Very well. Then we will keep the girl from turning Papist. Now let us be agreeable and comfortable. I really want to consult you about many things."

"Agreeable I will try to be, sir; comfortable never. I am glad that I have the courage to say thus much thus early before matters have gone any further."

Silcote bowed, and committed himself no further. He said afterwards to Arthur and Algernon, "Why, that very old

governess of Anne's thought once that I was going to propose to her, and choked me off. I seem to have come into the world with two left hands, two left legs, and somebody else's tongue. I am a man of strong will, and of great obstinacy; yet I never did, never do, and never shall do, the thing I mean."

By degrees Silcote and Anne's governess got into the ordinary channel of conversation. They were commonplace and polite at first. Miss Heathton went to the grave with the impression that Silcote had proposed to her, and that she had refused him. Miss Raylock ranks her among Spartan women on the strength of this story, or rather on Miss Heathton's perfectly honest development of the little incident mentioned above. Our business, however, is with their subsequent conversation, which, in allowance for human patience, shall be abridged. We, with our readers' interest in our eyes, pick it up at this point. Miss Heathton said, "This extreme and almost fierce opposition to Romanism appears to arise from two causes. The first, sir, the inordinate political pretensions of the Pope, which would prevent any English Catholic from being a true and hearty subject to a Protestant sovereign; and next, sir, the inordinate pretension of the priests to dictate in our domestic arrangements. Such are, as far as my judgment can guide me, the insuperable objections to that particular form of Christianity, and those two objections are, in my humble judgment, insuperable."

"I agree with you, madam, most entirely. You were subsidized—I hope the term don't offend you—for the purpose of expressing exactly that sort of opinion. You have done it in the most admirable manner. Bah! I am vexed and teased, and I fear I get rude. Your opinion, madam, is Philistine, but it is true. Could not we talk of something else?"

Not if Miss Heathton could help it. "I was, as you so truly say, sir, subsidized as expressing the *juste milieu* of modern, liberal thought. When I cease to do so, my engagement with you is at an end. I am at a loss to know why the expression 'Philistine'—which, I confess, I do *not* understand—should be applied to any utterance of mine. There can be nothing in it in any way offensive to an unprotected lady, or a man of the known courtesy of Mr. Silcote could never have uttered it."

"Offensive! My dear madam! Why, I am a Philistine myself. God bless you, I have wrecked my whole life on Philistine principles."

"I am delighted to hear that, sir," said the governess. "I was certain that our principles were the same. Now Miss Lee is a case in point."

"In point of what?" asked Silcote—"Philistine!"

"A case in point of what we were talking about," said Miss Heathton.

"What *were* we talking about?"

"Romanism, you know, and all that."

"Exactly," said Silcote. "And Miss Lee?"

"Why, Miss Lee as a case in point."

"And who is Miss Lee, and what point does she illustrate?"

"Do you mean to say you have not heard?"

"I have heard you, madam, for the last half hour, but what you are talking about I am at a loss to understand. Try a fact after such a mass of generalisations, if it is only for a change. Give us Miss Lee as a fact, and let us generalise from her. We really must start somewhere; let us start at Miss Lee. She is really the first tangible point we have come across in our conversation. I do not remember her, but she seems a fact. And do you know that you and I want facts sadly? Words won't do for ever. If you find yourself equal to answering for the personality and existence of this Miss Lee, let us have her and discuss her."

"Miss Lee, sir, is a friend of mine. Her whole early life was spent in an utter blank of ignorance. She was scarcely educated, left utterly unprovided for, and of course did what all poor girls in her situation do. Being perfectly respectable, perfectly ignorant, and utterly unused to teaching, she of course sought a position, which probably requires a more painfully careful training, and certainly involves more responsibility, than any other. She took a situation as governess."

"Don't be hard on her, madam," said Silcote. "She was rash, and had probably not calculated on the awful weight of moral responsibility which attaches to the post. We do not find such women as Miss Heathton every day."

Miss Heathton bowed a condescending little bow at the compliment, but, of course, did not waste breath in confirming such an obvious truism. "The first revelation which Miss Lee ever had of a higher life came through a very highly educated young priest."

"Bless the parsons!" said the Squire.

"And," said Miss Heathton, with dignity, "I much regret to say that I cannot approve of the conduct of that young priest, however much I may admire him personally."

"You admire him? Handsome?"

"Singularly. He educated her, he introduced her to higher things; to history, not merely secular, but, I regret to say,

ecclesiastical. He improved her wretched music, and in doing that took her away from her legitimate sphere at the piano, taught her the harmonium, and introduced her to such dangerous pieces as the 'Stabat Mater.' He also incited her to church needlework and church decorations, and ultimately took her to Wells Street."

"These priests are always at it, you know. But what the dickens did they go to Wells Street for?"

"He took her to Wells Street, sir, to sap and undermine her Church principles, sir. But he did worse than that. He gave rise to hopes in her breast, sir, which, if he ever meant to fulfil, he has never fulfilled as yet, and, indeed, is little likely to do so."

"Oh, the villain! And what did he do then?"

"Left her utterly without guidance, sir. The clergyman in whose family she was governess took to the same benighted courses; but he did not go far enough for her. The young priest of whom I speak, himself a renegade to the High Church party, held the prize of religious peace, of a soul-destroying, conscience-killing life of active good works and ornamental religion, before her, and then left her, without guidance, to follow that perfectly worthless prize, whithersoever it might lead her, alone. She loved him once, but I doubt if she loves him any more. He deserted her as no gentleman would have deserted her, because she was poor and could not help his ambition; but the poison he first put in her veins has acted better than he would wish, if he knew all. She is rich beyond telling now, and he is only a sad memory of a faithless and unworthy man to her. Meantime she, in her ignorance, in her blindness, in her disappointed passion, has gone forward on the road which he first pointed out to her; towards irresponsibility, towards what the poor fool considers peace, towards Rome. She is nearly there now."

"You tell your story well. Go on. I knew of these things once."

"I feel it, but I think I tell it but poorly. The poor girl thinks that, by accepting tradition, she can relieve herself of the responsibility of thinking for herself; that she can, by placing her conscience in the hands of a half-educated priest, bury the talent of intellect and free thought and free will with which God has largely gifted her. I would sooner have seen her dead. I would sooner that her soul stood bare before God to-morrow than see this. And *he* did it. He introduced her to the means, but, like a craven, would not guide her to the end."

"There is something in the air of this place," said Silcote,

"which makes every one talk himself into a passion. We shut ourselves up too much here. There is nothing so bad for the temper as shutting yourself up. There was Anne yesterday broke out. I have hardly behaved like a gentleman in all points of this afternoon's conversation, for I have exhibited passion. Now you yourself, gentlest and mildest of women, have lost your temper over a priest. (I never had any temper at their disposal, therefore I could not lose it.) That outrageous glorious daughter in—I should say daughter of democracy, Mrs. Sugden, must have got her powers of blowing up during her residence on this secluded and desolate hill of Boisey. Let us hope that the Thames which winds rounds its base will not catch fire. Now, madam?"

"You recall me, sir. You mentioned Mrs. Sugden just now, I think?"

"Half a minute ago."

"Do you know where she is?"

"No," said the Squire, most promptly. ("I don't you know," he made it out to himself; "she may be in the buttery or the dormitory, or for the matter of that anywhere;" but added, with more devotion than usual, "God forgive me for a lie.")

"Mrs. Sugden," pursued the governess, "is Miss Lee's cousin, and co-heiress with her in this vast fortune. She is supposed to be dead, and if she is not found in a certain time, as I am given to understand, Miss Lee takes the whole of the fortune, eight thousand a year, and Miss Lee is either at Rome or near it."

"The deuce! I will save four thousand a year if need be; but perhaps she is better as she is. Meanwhile you have interested me about this Miss Lee. Can't we save *her* four thousand a year from the priests? There is Arthur, a handsome young fellow to snatch a brand from the burning. Let us see what *he* can do. He can manage me at times; he ought to be able to manage her."

"Sir, you have misconceived me."

"I cannot see how, madam."

"This young priest of whom I have spoken is your son Arthur. Miss Lee, as I presumed you remembered, was your eldest son Algernon's governess: *voilà tout*."

"Do you mean to tell me that this Miss Lee, with the four thousand a year, is that two-penny girl I choked—I mean warned—Arthur from?"

"Certainly, sir."

"He must have been mad."

"Only prudent, my dear sir," said Miss Heathton. "He did not know about the four thousand a year. Another word before

we go in about Mrs. Sugden. She has a very high opinion of your family, and evidently knows something of it. It was she who wrote to her cousin, urging on her the acceptance of the situation as governess in your eldest son's house."

And so Miss Heathton took her goloshes inside, and left the Squire in somewhat of a rage.

He had a fancy, later in the evening, to go gently to the school-room, and see if he could get Miss Heathton to gossip again. Gently opening the door, he found that there was an old-fashioned four-fold screen in front of it, put there to keep Miss Heathton's legs from the draught. He slyly looked round it, and there were Miss Heathton and, moreover, Miss Raylock, with tea and toast, sitting over the fire and baking their insteps. He was no listener, but he could not help hearing Miss Raylock say: "My dear, Silcote knows where Mrs. Sugden is well enough. That little expression of his, 'I will save four thousand a year if need be,' shows it. And, if her husband is dead, and if I know human nature, he will marry her. Silcote would sell his soul for another four thousand a year."

"Confound that old woman," he said to himself. "She is the chorus to our family tragedy. And she is so confoundedly clever that she always goes beyond the mark, and her moral reflections on the state of affairs are never right. I wish she would study the Greek model, and not commit herself too far in advance of facts. And old Raylock would marry me to-morrow if I asked her. And I should hang myself that day se'nnight."

And then again over his solitary dinner he thought: "That noble wife of my most rascally son Tom, what is to be done with her? Not a soul knows where she is except myself, and possibly her half-brother. She is well off, and in her way happy. I sha'n't tell her about this fortune of hers. Tom would spend it all. I must go to town and see this will. I shall not disturb her yet; certainly not till I send the boy to Italy. He had better be kicked about: I ought to have been kicked about more. Suppose that I can keep her there in ignorance for a time, and send the boy to Italy, and so wait? Tom must not have her money."

CHAPTER XXXV.

AND WE HEAR ALL ABOUT MRS. THOMAS.

THE next morning Silcote received a very large and very long letter from Mrs. Thomas Silcote, which, without any comment, we subjoin, with the Squire's remarks.

"I promised to tell you all about myself, and I feel I can do so better by letter than *vivâ voce*.

"My father was a very small freehold farmer in Devonshire. His farm was so small that both he and my half-brother worked on it like common hinds, and as soon as I was old enough I helped.

"I got some schooling, I think about four days in the week, on the average, working on the others. I was a shabby poor drudge on working days, but, after the habit of the West country girls, I made up for it on Sundays. I was gay enough then, and I think I had a good taste in dress. My father was the second time a widower, and, until I was sixteen, we three (my father, my half-brother, and myself) lived happily together. My father was a good and kind man. My love for and gratitude to my brother are not to be expressed in words. I shall see him soon.

"I had few pleasures, my father and brother none at all. We lived a hard and dull life, in spite of the beauty of the country, and the exquisite softness of the climate. But periodically used to come two or three days together of real unalloyed pleasure. Dressed in my best clothes I used to walk to Exeter, eighteen miles away, and stay with an old aunt, who kept a very small shop in the lower part of the town, in a narrow street, which, with its bustle and life, was a paradise to me after our solitary little farm among the folding monotonous hills.

"On one of these expeditions, I was going steadily along the broad highway, wanting still six miles from the city, when I heard behind me a clattering of horses' hoofs and a jingling of steel; and, turning, saw three dragoons who clanked swiftly past, and disappeared round a turn in the road under a deep red cliff. I had not done admiring them when I saw the main body who followed them, and had to take as good care of myself as I could.

"They were not going much beyond a foot pace, and I drew against a gate to let them pass; and, as there were about two hundred, they were some time, during which I was exposed to every kind of jocular salutation. I wonder whether officers could prevent their men from insulting every woman they meet while

marching; I suppose not. However, they passed in time, and I, girl-like, hurried on after them, to see as much of them as possible.

"I was still so near them that I could hear the clank of their accoutrements and the tumult of their voices; and I was so absorbed in my girlish admiration of their gallantry and magnificence as they wound along between the dull red cliffs and the sparkling river, that I was unconscious that a solitary horseman was beside me until he spoke. A bold, clear, and yet very gentle voice said close to my ear, 'I hope the men have not been rude to you. We recruit, you know, from the wildest class in the community, but not from the lowest. Those men are rough and free in their salutations, yet they are soldiers, and I do not think there is one of them who would not protect you from real insult as boldly and as freely as I would myself.'

"As his sweet delusive voice fell on my ear, I turned and saw him, the man himself, may God forgive him, for the first time. A beautiful youth, all scarlet and gold, and steel, bending from his saddle, and looking gently and respectfully into my eyes.

" ' He was a lovely youth I guess :
The panther in the wilderness
Was not so fair as he.'

"Well, my fate has not been Ruth's, though but for God's mercy it might have been. Could I help looking frankly back into those frank young eyes (for he was frank and true then, Squire), and thanking him for his courtesy and solicitude in my bold free way?

" ' They are wild and free,' he went on, 'but they are not all evil. You are not one who should believe so, at all events, for they mainly come from your own class. And when they get an officer who will sympathise with them and trust them, they will follow him through fire and smoke and the horror of death, seeing not the terrors of mutilation or extinction (for they are all irreligious) before them, but only trying for an infinitesimal share of the great glory of some noble deed of arms, which alters history and leaves a mark on the face of time. These roughly-trained boors (forgive me, for you belong to their order, though the women in that class are so much superior to the men) fight, not for personal honour, but for the honour of the number of their regiment. The officers get rewarded; I, as one of them, should be rewarded, if I led some two hundred of them to a ghastly death under creditable circumstances. I, as an officer, get my reward in personal prestige, either to myself living, or to my memory dead; these poor sheep

fight for the honour of a number. Could you or I fight to the bitter end for the honour of the number 140, which is the number of this regiment? I think not. These men deserve respect.' ”

When the Squire had read so far he laid down the letter, and walked up and down the room. “How clever this woman is! That is Tom, you know, his own self. What a special pleader he would have made!” Then he resumed:—

“I cannot tell what I answered; but it was all over, and I loved him. He was the most beautiful and the most splendidly-dressed creature I had ever met. He spoke of new and noble things to me in a voice I had never heard before, and in a tone of confidential respect which flattered me exceedingly. I knew what other women of my class know, but I had no fear of him. I met his eyes boldly and fearlessly, and said—

“‘I respect them for their valour, but we peasants dislike, as a rule, having soldiers in our houses. They sell themselves to die, and prepare themselves for death by making themselves unfit to meet God:’ those were the very words I used to him. They were very strange ones for an uneducated peasant-girl, you will say. But we were Wesleyan.”

(“They would have been strange, madam,” was Silcote’s commentary, “in any one but yourself. But you are so utterly passing strange, that I wonder you confined yourself to such a very ordinary remark. So you were an uneducated Wesleyan at one time? Well, I am glad you confined yourself to that.”)

“He, Thomas, went on. ‘You have walked far,’ he said. ‘I was sitting in the inn at Crediton, looking out of the window, when you came up, dusty even then, and sat on the bench before the window. And I watched your face for twenty minutes as you sat and rested, and I saw in your face purpose and power. I am very young, and have seen no more of the world than any other young coxcomb of a dragoon officer; but I have brains enough to see that much. That is why I spoke to you.’

“If he had flattered my beauty, my dear father-in-law, I should have been on my guard in a moment. Our class is so far armed against yours, that we know what you mean when you begin *that*. What he did was quite of another kind. He talked freely with me as to a woman, with an intellect quite equal, if not superior, to his own. He discussed with me the question of small freeholds, and disagreed with me flatly when I defended them on the grounds of tradition; as I did, as well as my ignorance would allow, making up in bold, possibly fierce, denunciation what I lacked in logic. Half way between Cowley Bridge and Exeter, he suddenly reminded me that we had been

five miles together, and that we could scarcely enter the town on the same terms. Then he rode off, and I became aware of my indiscretion; I had been walking for five miles beside a dragoon officer and a gentleman (they are the dangerous class to us), and I did not know who might have seen us. I slept at my aunt's that night, and never moved out of the house. The next morning I set my face steadily homewards, in spite of the old lady's remonstrances. On my walk I passed the head-quarters of the regiment, and received the usual salutations, which I received with great scorn, in spite of the pleading of my cornet. I got home very late at night, when they were gone to bed.

"James opened the door to me. 'Sister,' he said, 'what brings you home so soon, and why do you look so wild?'

"I answered, 'I am come home because home is the best place for me. If I look wild it is because I have seen heaven, and am bound in all probability to live fifty years more on earth. Are you going to begin peas-hacking to-morrow?'

"'Yes. But something has gone wrong, sister. Tell me what.'

"'There'll be a short crop, I doubt,' I answered. 'I wish we could knock enough money together to drain that four-acre. We had peas three years running on that field, and the pigs don't pay. We are taking more off the land than we are putting in. That can't go on for ever.'

"I would not tell him anything; indeed, what had I to tell? Weeks afterwards he went to Exeter, and on coming back told me privately that a Cornet Silcote of the 140th Dragoons had set some of his troopers to watch my aunt's house, and that they had made every inquiry after me. I then knew that I must have been watched to my aunt's, for I am certain I had never told him even my name. This made me distrust him for a time. A very short time, for I loved him; and, although it was wicked of him to watch me, yet—shall I say it?—it was a compliment.

"No more Exeter expeditions now. There was a lion in the path. Peas harvest, barley harvest, wheat harvest, toil, heat, and the old squalid dress once more. Then the acorn hunting for the pigs, and a little revival of vitality when we killed at intervals two pigs for our own use, and lived on them as long as they lasted—not long in that hot moist climate. Then winter, with sweeping deluges of rain from Dartmoor, and a diet of bad bread and sour cider; all things—tithe, taxes, and everything—getting in arrear. Then my brother fell sick, and times got harder yet. I took his gun (for my father was nearly past his work) and I shot golden plover on the moor, a bird which will be still till you are close to him; and then getting bolder I fired at

snipe, and killed them too ; and lastly, unassisted, learnt to shoot woodcock. I put my bare arms into the half-frozen streams and pulled out the trout ; and once in my innocence, passing through a village near us with my brother's gun on my shoulder, and a quantity of golden plover in my hand, the whole population, children especially, turned out, and hooted and hissed me, as some one who had done an unnatural thing in trying to keep her father and her brother from the workhouse. I sneaked home by by-ways after that.

"But through it all, fool as I was, I had a companion,—a companion whom I could never see, but whom I often addressed. The image of my young friend the cornet of dragoons was always by me now ; though often I wished it far away.

"For it made me ashamed of my squalor and poverty sometimes ; sometimes do I say ?—nearly always. He so perfect, so noble, so splendidly decorated—I so squalid, so untidy, and so rude : an object for the laughter of the children of the village. Times were very hard and bitter with us that winter, as I told you before ; and I, a girl of seventeen, was left to fight everything single-handed. I used to go shooting (there was no game-preserving in our part of the country), in a coat made out of an old sack, and my shoes got so bad that I left them at home and went bare-footed. This would have been a deadly offence against the respectability of the villagers, had it been known, but our farm was very secluded, and I managed to creep away into the woodlands generally unobserved. Outlying wood-cutters and shepherds saw me sometimes, and reported me mad. I did not discourage this idea.

"But always, whether on the highest roll of the moorland after the golden plover and snipe, or in the depths of holly and oak after the woodcock, or with arms bare to the shoulder groping in the deadly cold water for the trout, the image of the young dragoon was beside me. Sometimes in my early solitary walks, imagining he had found me in my degradation, I would defy him and cast him off, tell him our ways were different, that he saw what I was, and that he should leave me on his honour. At another time I pleaded with him, told him how I was doing all this only for the sake of my father and my sick brother, and prayed him to help us. The fancy, however, which oftenest possessed me about him was this : that old Mr. Lee of Swincombe, our distant Devonshire cousin, was dead, and had left me all his great fortune ; and that I came before my dragoon like a princess in satins and jewels, and, by delivering him from dire necessity and disgrace, had him at my feet."

("By Jove," said Silcote, "how extraordinary! Just what has happened—so far; but I will hold my peace.")

"And so I fed my fancy with him until the course of my life was quite changed—not by an accident, it was simply in the course of events; but in this wise:—

"The only large proprietor about those parts was the Duke of Cheshire, who had a little cottage *ornée* on the edge of the moor among the woodlands, with nearly a thousand acres around it. The land was not preserved, indeed there was little or nothing to shoot there, and I used to range through it unforbidden.

"I had heard that Lord Wargrave, the Duke's eldest son, had come there to spend his honeymoon. My brother, who had crept out into the village, brought me this news, and told me also how his lordship's brother had been killed in a duel, and that Mr. Austin Elliot was in prison for taking part in it, and that the wedding had been quite quiet. I heard it with one ear and forgot it with the other; and, thinking little in my eagerness of bride or bridegroom, wandered into those very woods the next day.

"I heard men's voices—one the voice of a gentleman, in the wood—and two shots were fired. I fled, not because I feared any bad consequences from trespassing, for the Duke was known to us as a gentle man; the largest owner amongst those miserable little holdings, and consequently the only man who could afford to be a good landlord. I fled because I dreaded to be seen in my miserable guise by a gentleman; and tearing my bare feet among brambles, with a gun in my hand, a coat made of a sack upon my back, and my head perfectly bare, I blundered through copse and brake until I got into an open glade, and looking round, while I paused for breath, I found myself face to face within three feet of the bride, who was sitting quietly on a block of granite, waiting while the bridegroom amused himself by shooting through the wood.

"You know her glorious beauty, and you may conceive how she was dressed. I was a figure which might have upset most people's nerves: barefooted, bareheaded, with my wild hair about my face, and clothed in my ragged sackcloth, I came suddenly bursting on her with a loaded gun in my hand, and I fear a wild stare in my eyes, which has died out now, Silcote.

"But she was not at all afraid of me. The blood of the men of her family has so often made fertile the corn-fields of Europe, that cowardice has ceased to be one of the vices imputed to her family (and there are plenty of them). Her little silly dog at the sight of me at first barked furiously upon her lap, but, not feeling safe from such a fearful figure as I was, even under her protec-

tion, broke away from her, and ran yelping down the glade. I stood before her utterly abashed, with the gun in my hand, and she, rising, came quietly out to meet me, with wonder and pity in her eyes.

“‘My dear,’ she said, ‘what has brought you to this pass?’

“‘I am ready with my tongue; and I answered her quickly, ‘Empty barn and empty fold; cold house, cold hearth, cold bed, hungry body, and hungry heart: these things have brought me to this pass, my lady.’

“‘My dear,’ she said, ‘how beautiful you are.’

“‘I might say the same of you, my lady.’

“She blushed, and said, ‘Where do you live? In our happiness we must do something for you.’

“‘I told her; for the hearth was cold, harvest far off, and the bread-winners of the house struck down.

“‘Wait a little, my dear,’ she said, ‘my husband will be here directly.’

“‘I cannot face a gentleman as I am,’ I said, and fled away. She was the only one connected with my new life who ever saw me in my degradation; and she kept her secret.

“They came next day, and I was dressed out in my best, so that she scarcely knew me. Her husband was with her: a tall handsome man, with that gentle plastic Barty face, which is so familiar to me now.

“She had won me, and I followed her away. He bought my father’s farm, and the money he paid for the purchase was enough to see him into his grave in comfort. I went with her. James went again in the deep clay fallows, turning the tread-mill of this bitter agricultural life. And I used to write to him four times a year, regularly. Was it not good of me? And was he not grateful for the attention? There was I, a lady, or at least a lady’s maid; and there was he missing me every hour out of the twenty-four, and toiling in the fallows. But I wrote to him regularly four times a year, and he was grateful.

“I cannot dwell on this period. They spoilt me. For the first time, and the last time in my life, I was artificial, false, and ungrateful to my brother. They were all as good as gold, I *will* say that for them; but their words, their ideas, were nothing but wind. Among them, words and party cries had got crystallized into articles of belief. You have, doubtless, seen the same thing among very different people—Radical, Whig, and Tory alike. But they educated me in their way, and I grew to be a fine lady. Well! well! I have lingered long on the prettiest half of my story. I will be briefer with the rest.

“We were at Dunstegan Castle in Scotland, and there was a great company there. The Duke and Duchess of Rosshire were entertaining the world. Royalty was there at one time, and went in its turn; but the departure of Royalty put no check on the festivities. In this age, with a democracy creeping slowly on, I suppose such a state of things will soon become impossible. All I have to say about it is that it was very beautiful, perfectly harmless—as far as ostentation and extravagance can be harmless—and that it enriched that barren and meagre quarter of Scotland enormously. But it was too exciting. Calm thought was utterly impossible. There was no repose. It was one succession of beautiful and magnificent scenes, from the early morning, when the swarming kilts began to awaken from the places where they lay, and collect in the courts, to the last hour of the light northern night, when the latest dancers crept to rest, to renew the wild splendid dissipation the next day: the men to the moor, the women to the carriages and horses, the gardens and the river and the shore. Every one was *tête montée*, I among the number.

“I did not know who was there, and who was not. They came and went swarm after swarm. When a cabinet minister or a foreign prince came, we, the quieter and higher servants, heard of it, and peeped over banisters to get a look at him; but of the general company we knew nothing. I was, too—my personal appearance—I had reasons for being—very quiet. I kept mostly in my lady’s rooms. At last came the Duchess of Rosshire’s birthday, and there was to be a great ball in which all the servants were to take part.

“I was intensely delighted. We talked about it for days before. It was understood among us that the factor was to open the ball with the Duchess, and the Duke with the housekeeper. After this there was to be an entirely democratic selection of partners. Any one of us might have the sublime chance of dancing with a peer of the realm (and getting a wound not easily healed, a bitter festering wound of discontent and vanity, for if their order understand anything more than another it is the art of making themselves agreeable to women). We talked about it, and with our silly heads half off our shoulders, we went down into the hall: the *select* group among the servants, and stood or sat in a bevy together.

“The gentlemen were wandering about looking for partners, but a quantity of them were exactly opposite to us, and began to look at us,—not in the least rudely. I give them all that credit. I selected my partner from among them at once; Lord Tullygoram

—young, handsome, good-natured, in the kilt, and covered all over with silver and cairngorm stones—took my fancy. My feet were patting the floor in anticipation of the idiotic excitement of dancing, and he looked like a partner worth dancing with. I saw that he was coming towards me, and I was ready for him.

“But it was fated that I was not to dance with him. Another eye had been on him and on me, and his lordship danced with the still-room maid.

“He was too deliberate in his motions. While he was calmly coming across the hall, with what is popularly supposed to be the deliberate stride of the native mountaineer, a figure came between me and him, and obscured him,—the figure of a tall man, in ordinary English evening dress. This man said to me, ‘You must dance with me first to-night, if it is only for the sake of that precious and never-forgotten talk I had with you on the road between Crediton and Exeter, when I pretended that my horse was lame, that I might keep pace with your dear, weary little feet. And so I have found you at last.’

“It was Thomas; was it not like him? *You* know his tongue.

“Well. There came a quieter time, but we stayed on there, and he stayed on. And then we went to another Scotch house, and the end of it was he came after me, and we were married before witnesses, in the Scotch way. End of it, I say?—no, the end of it was that he left me before my boy was born, and went abroad with his regiment. You know his vague purposeless way. You know how he never will face facts. You, who have paid his debts so often, must know that. When he got tired of me, he did not choose to face the fact of my being his wife. He left me to assert it; and I would have died in the workhouse sooner than do that.

“I went straight back to my good brother, and told him the truth. I can make him do anything. I made him move up into Berkshire, and live in that cottage outside your park-gates. Why, I cannot tell you exactly. To be near him, and yet away from him. To have the chance of seeing him sometimes, yet with a certainty almost that I should never see him. He was faithless to me; I knew that. But why go on to analyse the motives of a wronged, angry, and fierce woman, whose motives were entirely passionate, and never reasonable. I have been tamed since I parted with you in the garden.

“I believe that I have outlived my love for him. I cannot say, but I think so. My first purpose in coming to live at your gates was a mere whim of a fanciful temper; but we got there

into utter poverty, into the deep clay rut of agricultural life, from which there is no turning. My soul got deadened with the everlasting weary routine, and utter poverty once more became a habit. My brother might have spoken and urged me to appeal to old friends; but my brother is one of that order which seldom speaks, except in blazing ricks: the habit of his order kept him silent.

"How many years did I live there bringing up your grandson on your own estate? Nearly twelve, I think. And my bitter, fierce temper lasted all that time. James and I passed for man and wife for convenience sake. I drudged in the fields with him, and we had a hard life of it. My boy grew in beauty and intelligence, and I educated him; but I had a bitter feud against the upper orders, and I determined that he should not be in any way connected with them. In my darkest hours I used to say that he should avenge my wrongs against the order which had wronged me. That this was a folly madder than your own, I will allow; but I was as mad as this once.

"It was a weary time, Silcote,—a dull time. I have a considerable sense of humour, and I love amusement. I had nothing to amuse me all that time, with one exception. If it had not been for that one thing which kept my sense of humour still alive, I might have gone mad. It is possible. But there was one object always before me, which made me laugh, which kept up some sort of communication with the world I had left, through my sense of humour,—which means, I take it, sympathy in the main. What was that object? Why, I will tell you. It was you yourself: the dreadful Dark Squire Silcote, who went swearing and scolding about among his bloodhounds. If I had known, as I do now, how deeply and shamefully you had been abused, I should have sympathised with you. But in those times you were always, to me, a great standing absurdity. (Yes, my dear Silcote, you may pitch this letter to the other end of the room, but I never was a bit afraid of you, and I am not now.)"

(Silcote had actually done that same thing. But after having picked the letter up again, and read the paragraph between brackets, as above, he felt terribly guilty, and only said, "Confound the woman.")

"You were then ridiculous to me. At first I thought you merely ill-conditioned; but watching you very closely, and hearing a great deal about you, I changed my opinion of you. You were still ridiculous—and you are now, you know, when in your old mood; but I begun to say to myself, 'That man is not the mere fantastic ruffian he wishes to appear.' I was confirmed in my opinion. The peasant drudges about you gave you a good

character, a character which many a smooth-faced, gentle-spoken man would be glad to have. They told me of many acts of kindness and generosity which you had done, and for which they in their way loved you. These acts of kindness were done in a brutal and coarse way, but they are used to brutality and coarseness, and the effects of your good acts, and the memory of them, remained behind, in these peasants' minds, long after the coarse words with which they were accompanied had died out in their ears.

"So I studied you, until I got in a small degree to pity you, and, last and strangest of all, to love you. I thought we had something in common; I knew not what. Who can predicate either quality or accident of a woman's soul, which traverses so fantastically all your well-built average rules? (We are the only true radicals; keep us on a Christian basis, if you can manage it for us.) I got to love you, Silcote; and got to trust you.

"I had never seen my husband all this long time. He had been often at Silcotes for a short time, yet I never had seen him. I have done evil by him. I might have reclaimed him. Though he had thrown me over, yet he practically allowed that he dared not marry, for he never, in his most prosperous times, attempted to do so. I saw him again after twelve years, and the sight of him stirred me, I cannot say why, to new action.

"The gamekeeper roused us in the night to tell us the poachers were in the wood, and standing in the doorway I saw *him* outside in the moonlight. My brother went out to fight for the game in which he had no share—to fight on the mere instincts of his order against lawless and inexcusable vagabonds. When I went upstairs to look at my darling in his bed, I found that he had escaped me, and had gone also. I lit a fire, and sat up for them, waiting. I could not pray then, but I could think.

"I could think, but I could come to no conclusion. I was not certain of my legal position, and dreaded branding my boy with illegitimacy, and ruining his life in that way. My brother was brought home to me, half killed in defending your game. My boy ran back to me in the morning, frightened to death by your bloodhounds, bruised fearfully; and then *you* came, and proposed to make my noble James, your own grandson, groom, page, steward's-room boy, or what not, out of your high and mighty condescension.

"A worm will turn, and I am not a worm. I fear I scolded you sadly. But I saw that I must either claim my rank, or else put myself in a false position by staying where I was. When you had proposed to me that morning to make your heir (for if Algernon is not righted, he *is* your heir) a groom, I determined

to move. My brother was ready. The only question was about the boy.

"I gave you the boy. You remember our interview in the garden. I gave you the boy, and you have done well by him. I have no complaint to offer there. You have done better by the boy than I could have done myself. I thank you for it. Let the boy be, and let me be, as we were. Not a soul knows who I am or what I have been, except yourself and my brother. Wait.

"My brother. He is a soldier, a ten-years' man, invalided now from wounds got in the Crimea. Leave *him* alone, until I tell you what to do for him. As for James, let him go to Italy : and as for you, leave me here in peace. I can part with him again now, for a time. I have won the boy's love on a new ground. He would have loved me by tradition before ; he loves me by choice now. Silcote, if that motherless boy were set to choose a mother from all the women in England, he would choose me, which is something.

"Leave things as they stand. Let the wheel go full circle. We are not so much worse off than our neighbours. There are things which trouble all the little Silcote world : I mean the little world which circles round you and your money. You are the greatest difficulty. I dread setting you right in your life-long mistake, but I will have it done nevertheless. You cannot gain anything by believing a lie about the only woman you ever loved : I say no more now ; let us turn our attention to smaller matters. Arthur is in love with my cousin, Miss Lee, who has got all the Basset property, so James tells me (he might have left *me* something, I think) ; and Miss Lee will now have nothing to say to him. Can you set that right ? There are other little troubles which you and I must see too. These children have grown up, while we have been foolishly wasting our lives on old loves and old grievances. These children are now grown up, and they have the foolish world-old habit of falling in love with one another. And there is mischief brewing amongst them.

"James and Dora are in love with one another. I would not have it otherwise ; but Reginald, our poor nonentity, is in love with Anne. A very nice arrangement among the cousins, but for this : that Anne is unhappily in love with James. It is to the credit of her good taste, I will allow ; but it will breed desperate mischief. You say they are all children together : may be so, but turn your mind towards it. Reginald and Anne are dangerous characters. Reginald I have studied, Anne I only know from James. Be careful. Send James to Italy, and let Reginald go with him. That is my latest advice. Now, good-bye."

Silcote folded up the letter, and put it in his breast coat-pocket. "Italy, Italy, Italy, and all Italy together," he said. "James is to go to Italy, and Reginald with him. And Anne is to go to Italy. I have committed myself to that in a way, but she may be stopped at Baden. And my sister has not been there for a long time, and so may be considered almost due. And they are beginning to knock up another dust there, and so Frangipauni will go there if he can raise the money; and Sir Godfrey Mallory has come home—a sure sign that there is mischief brewing. Old Raylock will get tired of toasting her old shins against my coals, and taking away my character afterwards, and *she'll* go. Then Arthur's health will give way, and *he'll* go. And then Mrs. Tom will get a new fancy for her precious husband, and *she'll* go. And Tom will be certainly quartered in Lombardy, and *he'll* be there, for the confusion of counsel. And then I shall get bored, and *I* shall go: and there will be no one left in England but Algernon and Dora, to do the respectabilities while we are smelling uselessly-burnt gunpowder. For, as I always tried to hammer into the wooden head of the man Garibaldi, you will do no good with that Sardinian monarchy. An Italian Federal republic is the only chance for them: and there is no chance of that. If they move, Austria and France will fight over them, and the winner will pick their bones. And Austria must win, her time has come. I may go and see the fight, and I'll be hanged if I can see why Dora should not come too. Hang Italy! Am I never to have done with it?"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BREAKING UP.

DECEMBER had lain his hand on the lake at St. Mary's, and it was a sheet of grey ice, with here and there a wisp of white snow upon its surface. All around the level lines of the moorland were white against a grey sky, except where broken by the deep blackish-green of the Scotch fir woods. The beautiful building itself, generally of a pearl grey, now looked muddy-coloured and dirty amidst the blazing white of the snow-drift. Winter had come on the place, in short, and with winter breaking-up day, and for James and Reginald the last of St. Mary's for ever. We may leave Reginald.

James, with a glorious career just opening to him, panting and eager to begin it, was probably about as happy as any mortal ever was in this world. Young, strong, clever, innocent, without regrets, but living in a glorified atmosphere of splendid hopes—I doubt if the human imagination could conceive of any man more unutterably happy. He had possibly a few sentimental memories just now, the effect of which was so mildly, deliciously mournful and pathetic, that they were even more charming than his glorious, jubilant, half-maddening confidence in the splendid future before him.

For the old place, so new and yet so old to him, had become very dear to him. He had “kenned the biggin’ o’ it,” as Edie Ochiltree says. There he had first made acquaintance with a very beautiful and happy life; and even in anticipation of the more beautiful life—the life which was to be spent among objects of Italian beauty, to which the dim wolds of Hampshire were cold and wan—even now, with a feeling of joy upon him near akin to that pain which they call, I think, præcordial anxiety, he had a few gentle regrets connected with the old place, which balanced his joy and made it bearable. Recall, if you are not too old, the last time you were *glad*; and you will more than half do my work for me. But it was so long ago, you say. Still try to recall it. I suspect that it was the day you left school, or the day you first went to chapel in your cap and gown, or if you are in another rank in life, on the last day of your apprenticeship.

Impatiently going round and round the college, from chapel to dormitory, all the morning, and talking to his old friends who swarmed round him, did not quiet him very much. He was to go the next morning, but he could not think of having to say good-bye to any of them. They were all going, and he would, as he thought, certainly meet them again. He did not like to say good-bye to them, and persuaded himself that it would not be necessary. But there was one in that establishment to whom he must say good-bye, for he knew well that he should see his face no more: and so instead of going to dinner in hall at one o’clock, he went to the outer lodge at the end of the grounds, and, sitting down in the warm little parlour, took his old friend Ben Berry’s hand in his, and looked wistfully into his face, saying not one word.

The old man was very old now: the clock was near stopping, and could not be wound up in this world. But the withered, gnarled old hand, which James did not hold, went feebly up among the young man’s curls, and lingered there lovingly.

“I knew you’d come,” he said. “I never reported you on

earth, but I'll report you in heaven. You have been a good boy to me."

James sat silent.

"You was a poor little boy when you came, but see what you've grown to. Similarly I ain't much to look at just now, though I was a fine young man once. Look at me, James, and keep me in your mind. If God gives you life and health, you'll be like me one day; and after that again—and after that again——"

The old man said this sentence three or four times over, and James had tact enough not to speak: only to press the old fellow's hand. His feeble old mind went on another tack.

"Listening! Well, yes. You boys want a listener at times, and so do other folks. But I never reported a boy yet for anything I heard haphazard at a door, and I won't report her. There is nothing dishonourable in a school porter listening: but if he reports on it, he gets dishonourable, and deserves to lose his place. I'm the oldest school porter in England, and I ought to know the international law between porter and boy, if any man does. And that's the law. And it extends to matrons and chairmen equally."

James thought he was wandering. "I start for Italy to-morrow, Ben," he said. "I have come—for I must say it—to say good-bye. You have been as kind and as faithful a friend as ever I had; and I thank you so very, very much. But I go to Italy to-morrow."

"To Italy to-morrow? I am bound on a longer journey, but I shall be at my journey's end before you for all that. Then good-bye. I can't make your face out clear. But be good to your mother as you were to me. Your mother is a woman in ten thousand. There is nothing you shouldn't do for your mother. Stick to her through thick and thin. A man never has a mother but once, and seldom such a mother as yours."

James made his farewell to the old fellow (who soon died), and went his way, believing him to be rambling in his mind. The half-year's prizes were to be given away that afternoon at two o'clock, and the County was coming. He thought for the time little about old Berry's wandering.

Sir Godfrey Mallory in a great barouche, all alone, dressed in priceless sables, with the fur inside, and shivering, was the first arrival. Silcote in a bran new travelling carriage (Anne's), and four horses with scarlet postilions, was so close after him that Silcote had time to dismount, and to look at Sir Godfrey Mallory as he got down. Sir Godfrey bowed and smiled at him, not in the least recognizing his old enemy; and Miss Raylock, who had

arrived in a fly from the nearest railway station, and had been forced to get out of it, having recognised the two carriages, for the purpose of seeing the meeting of the two old enemies and studying human nature, was stricken motionless in the snow.

And the rest of the County, who resided close by, were there. The frost had stopped the hunting, and there was nothing to do: and, as the foolish old song says, "Anything is fun in the country," and so they were to see the prizes given away; manners preventing them from yawning in each other's faces; sitting about on the benches, telling each other where they had dined every day for the last week, and finding out from one another where they were going to dine the next; good, kindly, intelligent, honest folks as ever lived, but more idiotic in their worship of mere habit than the Indians who are swung on hooks at a fair, leaving alone the fact that the Indian process has the advantage of cheapness, which the English form of prescriptive martyrdom has not. I suppose they both—as Mr. Mad Dick in "David Copperfield" says to the great indignation of Aunt Betsy—"do it for pleasure."

However, here were the country folks, trying to gain a feeble amusement by seeing the prizes given away at St. Mary's, and they formed an important and imposing audience. Silcote gave away the prizes. Each master in turn gave aloud the names of the boys under his charge, and they were called up to receive them. Silcote did his work very well indeed, giving a few kindly sensible words, accompanied in every instance by a clever point or epigram, to each of the boys as he came up. He had been famous for neat and concentrated, and also sometimes for sharp language in old times, and he was pleased to find that the old trick was not lost with so much else, and came out. The County were charmed with the vivacity and cleverness of this mysterious man, who had held them all at bay so long.

The classical boys came first of all, and when they were done the commercial boys. Then the winners of French prizes, named by M. Leroy; then the German, named by M. Meyer; and then the Italian.

Silcote, rising, once more said, "We have now only to ask Signor Frangipanni to name the winners of prizes in his class, and then we will proceed to the prize of the day, and conclude the proceedings." He did not sit down again; he looked right and left steadily, for he could not make out where Signor Frangipanni was sitting, and he had a deep eagerness to see him. He would have liked to watch Sir Godfrey Mallory also, but that was impossible.

The noble-looking Italian advanced into the middle of the hall as the others had done, and he and Silcote looked steadily at one another without anything more than a formal bow. An interest, intense even now, and soon to grow more intense still, was arising in the hearts of Englishmen about Italian men and Italian things. And the Count knew it, and coming once more into public after ten years, felt that he was showing this knot of English country gentlemen what an Italian and a conspirator could be like.

He was not among an audience very keen on the object which was nearest to his heart, perhaps ; but the country gentlemen knew a gentleman when they saw one, and the ladies were tolerably good judges of perfect dignity and perfect grace ; and as the Americans say, were " excited along of him." That splendid-looking, grizzle-headed man, so tall, so grand, so upright, had experiences of which they could know nothing. He had been imprisoned, had escaped, had been hunted and proscribed ; had been through every kind of misery and danger for his cause, and had come out with a pure and unstained name. It was impossible not to admire him. A buzz went round the hall, so loud as to give a pause to the proceedings, as the better informed told the less informed about him. " Frangipanni, the decemvir—escape from Spandau—cut his way out of Rome in command of Garibaldi's rearguard ;"—the actions of Garibaldi, Saffi, Mazzini, Manin, and a dozen others, were rapidly placed to his credit, as rapidly as they could be remembered. The impulsive English found themselves in possession of the desire of their hearts, a hero, and he a Count of a great name, and buzzed so loudly that Count Frangipanni could not be heard.

At this point Arthur the unaccountable, without moving from the chair in which he sat by his father, with a somewhat cynical smile on his very pale young face, outraged the decency of a head-master by crying out suddenly and sharply, " Vive Garibaldi ! " A cheer went ringing round the hall directly. Tories as they mostly were, they had a cheer for the purity and valour of that one man.

Frangipanni flushed up to the roots of his hair, but stood stately and immovable, only bowing once ; when the noise had subsided they heard his voice—clear, strong, and melodious, nearly without accent. He passed over the late little demonstration without notice.

" My class has been small, sir, but I have been diligent with it. Continual diligence in politics begets diligence in every-day matters, and diligence in the master makes diligence in the pupil. My class of five would get prizes, all of them, elsewhere ; but I

must select. I name Reginald Silcote as gainer of the prize, and James Sugden as *proximè*."

The gratified Squire delivered the prize in this instance in silence; and Arthur, walking swiftly down to Count Frangipanni, talked eagerly with him for a few minutes, and then, having put a paper into his hand, walked back to his chair, leaving Frangipanni still standing in the centre of the hall. They all wondered why until he spoke.

"Our good head-master," he said, in his graceful, dignified way, "has put a labour of love upon me, which I am proud to discharge, however unfit. He says it is as a parting compliment to me, but what compliment have I earned in so short a time? It cannot be that he trusts this honour to a poor exile because there are some so ignoble and so wretched here as to doubt the nobility, the purity, and the excellency of his character. That he is unpopular? No! That is impossible. I will not believe that. It is not in England that perfect justice and kindness should not be appreciated. It is because I go from England into the dark south cloud, to death or prison, that he gives me this pleasant commission; that is all. I will do my duty, then.

"There has been a prize established here, ladies and gentlemen, on these grounds. The whole school are to elect by ballot the boy who has made himself most *répandu*, most popular, during the year, and to send his name to the head-master for approval. They have done so, and the head-master has enthusiastically approved of their choice. The name of the boy they have chosen is my friend James Sugden."

Three heads went down: the Squire's for one instant; then James's, who had been a little idle, and had got beyond the region of prizes, and was utterly unprepared for this; and, lastly, his mother's, sitting calmly in a distant corner of the hall unobserved, and her head remained down longest.

James was brought forward to receive his prize, and, the proceedings being as good as over, the boys broke loose and swarmed around him: and from his old and well-tried comrades, down to the very latest comer, there were none who had not kind actions and kind words of his to thank him for now and to remember hereafter. It was a glorious triumph,—such a triumph as never comes twice in a lifetime except to statesmen with long dulled enthusiasm, and more or less carefully-guarded passions. *They* may get hysterically glad in great successes, but they can't be boys again. *Joy* is the inseparable accident of youth. We can be *glad* no longer.

They all crowded out of the hall together towards the cloisters;

the county folks, the masters, the boys—every one. James was congratulated on all sides, and having been utterly *tête montée* all day was now considerably upset. In the midst of the crowd he found himself alongside of the matron, his mother—to him only his friend Mrs. Morgan, who was calmly steering her way through them all, with her grey head bare, and her grey shawl drooping from her splendid throat over her handsome shoulders; he clutched her arm and, looked innocently into her quiet eyes, said, passionately—

“I wish my mother could see me now! I have been thinking so much of her lately. Oh, I wish to God she could see me now! I shall never be so worthy of her again.”

And she bent forward in the midst of them all, and kissed him three times on his forehead, and said, “Wait! wait! I cannot tell you why, but wait!”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A HAPPY MEETING.

I think it very likely that, if there had been any liquor-shops close to St. Mary's, James, in the full flush of his excitement on this last and most triumphant day at the old place, would have got easily tipsy. But he had no opportunity, and certainly no inclination. He knew nothing of the effects of stimulants more than any other St. Mary's lad. There were legends among the oldsters of boys having got drunk in the old times, when the college was in town, but those legends were now very old indeed, and the only creed among the boys about drinking was that it was a manly and gentlemanly habit, from which they were unfortunately debarred. The lad, therefore, tired with pleasure and excitement, rendered himself, in a pleasantly weary frame of mind, to his mother's room about half-past nine, and found her more busy than usual among her maids, giving all kinds of careful directions, apparently with a view to her departure.

He had time to gather this much before she spoke to him. She only smiled at him when he first came in, and asked him by her eyes to stay. After a little time she said to the maids, “I think everything is in perfect train, now. See that I find it so on my return; I shall not be long. Work as if I was looking on

at you—firstly, because it is your duty ; and secondly, because I shall demand an inexorable account from you when I come back. Those are no workers, to my taste, who can only work under the master's eye.—My dear James, you are, of all people in the world, the one I wished to see most.”

It was the first time she had ever called him by his Christian name ; he wondered why, and she herself could not have told him at that time. She was still undecided whether she would reveal herself to him or not.

“James,” she said, when the maids were gone, “you go to Silcotes to-morrow ? How ?”

“I shall walk, Mrs. Morgan. I came to say good-bye. I can't exactly begin——”

“Then don't begin. That is perfectly easy, is it not ? I also am going to Silcotes ; I also am going to walk. I want you, if you will do so much for an old woman, to let me walk with you, and to show me the way. Will you do this for me ? I walk fast and far, and must be back quickly, for my good maidens are, with all their good intentions, but disjointed limbs without their head. Will you undertake the old woman ?”

“Undertake you !” said James. “Why, I'll wheel you there in a Bath-chair, if you like. But it is nonsense. I tell you you will never get there on foot. I make a bee line of it, and it is three-and-twenty miles.”

“Three-and-twenty fiddlesticks, boy. No distance at all. Will you show me the way ?”

“I should like to, better than I can tell. Do you think you can manage it ?”

“I will walk as fast as you will, and as far. Go to bed, your head is hot ; to-morrow morning at ten, then, at the south end of the cloisters.”

The south end of the cloisters was close to the great gate, and was the place at which people generally waited before departure. James, his uniform now cast off for ever, was early there ; he was, in fact, the very first arrival.

But he was not long alone ; he was joined by Reginald, now a pale-faced youth of some eighteen years, with a weak and small, but very pretty and gentle face. He, too, had finished his academical career the night before, and had left the dormitory, and had slept at his father's, and so James had not seen him since the last evening. James saw that he was vexed at something, and asked him what it was. The relations between them hitherto were merely those of a boy with character and boldness acting on one without either, overlaid with a strong boyish

affection ; relations scarcely worth noticing until now. James asked him, confidentially, what was the matter.

"Queen Elizabeth was a Tartar, I expect," said Reginald. "Don't you think she was?"

"What the deuce do I care? She had the tongue of her family, and lashed out at times ; but she is dead, you know."

"Ah ! but Anne ain't dead though, and she has got the tongue of *her* family, too. I'll back the Silcote tongue against the Tudor any day of the week. And I have been having a taste of it this morning."

"You generally seem to be getting a taste of it, Reg, as far as I see. Why don't you give her as good as she brings? *You* have got the Silcote tongue, too, haven't you? Why don't you pitch into her?"

"Because I can't. She stabs me with a dagger, while I lose my temper, and make blind hits at her with a cudgel. She makes me lose temper, and consequently judgment, in a moment. *She* never loses her temper."

"Loses it? No, I should think not. It is too visible a thing to be lost. Why, Reg, there is nothing about her but her temper, except her beauty. She won't lose her beauty till she is old, and her temper is far too *prononcé* to be lost, or even mislaid for long. It's a shrewish temper, and she is a shrew. Why the dickens do you bother yourself with her?"

"Just hear what she said to me at my own father's breakfast-table this morning."

"What is the good?" said the gentle James. "What on earth is the good? She has irritated you this morning : is that any reason why you should irritate yourself all over again? Besides, here she comes herself, and will, if I know her, let us know all that has passed. Let be."

Anne's horse and groom had been sent over from Silcotes, and she was to ride back. She came quickly towards them down the cloister, in her grey riding-habit, with the long skirt of it caught over one hand, and her whip in the other. A trim, pretty, doll-like little figure, with a very pretty small-featured face, terribly hard set about the mouth, and nearly as narrow, from eye to eye, as her own grandfather's, "the impersonation of Silcotism," as Miss Raylock once called him.

Her greeting had all the suspicion and all the abruptness or that remarkable family, or, to be more correct, of all the members of that family whom Miss Raylock set down as "true Silcotes." She never said "Good morning," or anything of that sort, but she went up to James, and said—

"So he has been telling you *his* story, then?"

"All right," said the perfectly placid James. "Now you turn to, and tell us yours."

"I knew he would," said Anne. "I was perfectly sure that he would take the opportunity of my putting on my riding-habit, to take his story to you. I *knew* that."

"Well, but you see," said James, "that he hasn't done anything of the sort. Now let us have *your* story to begin with. I know nothing of his. Why on earth do you two squabble and fight so? What is the matter this time? Was not there bread and butter enough for the pair of you?"

Anne tossed her head and turned away. If James could have seen her face, he would have known, boy as he was in reality, that for the moment she hated him, while she loved him.

To more pleasant matters. Old Algernon joined them. He looked very grey, very gentle, and very good, and he came to James—

"You will make a success if you do as well in the world as you have done here"—and gave him good advice.

James, though not in the least inclined for goody talk on that particular morning, as little inclined as are my readers, listened to it respectfully, but was relieved by the arrival of Arthur, who at least changed the conversation, though possibly turned it into a less agreeable channel. Probably he has been called "*prig*" too often in these pages; he was more than that. Everything he did was done with a will, using generally a miserly minimum of means towards the largest maximum of end. He did exactly the same with his money, and so, in these times, he stands out as a consistent and virtuous character. He was niggardly and cautious with his money, though he had protested against his brother Tom's disinheritance. He was niggardly and cautious in his sympathy with the boys under his charge, because he hated the idea of discounting, in the very smallest degree, his prestige as headmaster; of abating one jot of the newly-gained power among two hundred boys. A power which was the dearer to his heart, because it was more absolute, and more easily and more visibly exercised, than any power he had possessed before; it was a greater power than his old power as proctor of Oxford, and he loved it proportionately more. The man had power, force, will, call it what you like, and he loved it. He hoarded his money, because he saw that his brother Thomas had lost power by spending *his*; he utilized the power which his conduct towards that brother had given him in the eyes of his father, because he wished to discount his generosity in the form of power over his father; and he was

cold and unsympathetic with his boys, because it was his nature, and his nature had been doubly confirmed in him by a course of unpopular Oxford donnery.

He was not fond of James. James was just now a mere genial idle being, who had stayed too long at school, had got to the top of it, and, not having a University career before him, had become perhaps idle, certainly popular. Arthur did not like popular boys; he himself, the salt of the earth, had been always eminently unpopular. He had an objection to popular boys. There was one gliding out of his clutches, though still in his cloisters, and he let him know it. Besides, he was still desperately angry about Miss Lee.

"Well boy," he began. "And so my father has consented to send you to Italy to study art. Goodness knows you need it. But you will make a mess of it; you haven't got either brains or genius. The only reason I see for his decision is that you *may* be fit for it, and that you are certainly fit for nothing else. I saw one gleam of genius in you once, in a caricature of me, but it was evanescent. I would have pressed on him sending you to the University, but I didn't think you were worth the trouble and expense."

James was out of his power, and had no idea of his relationship to him; and he had a shrewd tongue, and could possibly have given him as good as he brought. But he did not. When Arthur had done with his bitter hard words, he went quietly up to him, took his hand and said—

"Before we part I have got to thank you for all your kindness and care for me since you have been here. You know as well as myself how utterly undeserving I have been of it. I wish to tell you, sir, that my faults have only been due to a natural boisterousness which I will try to correct" (he looked *very* like it, he looked a *very* likely person to "correct boisterousness;" but the lad was in earnest, and must not, if possible, be laughed at). "I want very much, sir, before we part, to impress on you the fact that you have won my entire esteem and respect. And I'll tell you something more, sir. The other fellows don't like you, but they trust you."

Arthur flushed up scarlet; he was outdone in generosity by a boy he had thought to worry into impertinence. The "gentleman" burst out of him instantly. "You are a noble fellow, sir. If you turn chimney-sweep or scavenger you will be a gentleman still. I ask your pardon for having misconceived you. My health is very bad, and my life is extremely uncertain. With my health my temper suffers: I will try to correct it. I should have wished

a different career for you, but for such a noble nature as yours I have no anxiety. Your future will be turbulent and wild, but try to keep by the old faith : as I draw nearer death I only love it more. Write to me from Italy."

"Italy, and again Italy," said Count Frangipanni's voice behind them ; "and they all talk of Italy now. And I come to make my *congé* to the best of all head-masters, and I wait and wait long time till my head-master has done walking up and down the cloister with his hand on the shoulder of my pupil ; my Sugden. And I hear the word Italy, and that gives excuse to break my manners, and to make *congé*. For the train will wait at Basingstoke, but not for me. And from Basingstoke the iron lines go southward. Whither ? Into thunder-cloud, into darkness, into blood, into fury and madness ; into calm, peaceful, everlasting sunshine. And I must go."

"What, you are at it again you folks, are you ?" said Arthur, in a tone which was decidedly not synpathetic with the cause of Italian freedom, though he had the day before called out "Vive Garibaldi !" in one of his unaccountable moods. "You are at it again, are you ? after '48 too. Well, 'he who will to Cupar maun to Cupar.' The Tuscans won't go with you, they are too well governed ; and, if you hope anything from the Sardinian monarchy, you are madder than I take you for. And, on your very first movement, France will be over the Alps on you, in anticipation of Austria ; and there will be a fight between Austria and France over your carcase, and Austria will win one great battle, and after that will consent to annex Piedmont, giving France Savoy, Nice, and Tuscany, and consenting to a joint protectorate over the rest of Northern Italy. You had better leave it alone and stay here."

To which remarks Count Frangipanni bowed his head three times solemnly, and in perfect silence, not trusting himself to express his wonder in words, made his *congé* to the head-master, and backed away over Mr. Betts, who said,—

"Now then, Count ! I have not done anything against Italian liberty to deserve having my foot trod on like that. Do you know that Kriegsthurm has hooked it ?"

"That Kriegsthurm has hooked it ?" said the Count. "I am at a little loss to fathom the meaning of what you say. Hook it ?"

"Ah ! hooked it, Count. But lor, it's no use talking slang to a gentleman like you. Cut away, do you understand ? Hopped his twig ; sloped ; mizzled it ; made his lucky ; you understand *that* !"

The Count shook his head and went away in the direction of James.

Betts stayed with Arthur and Algernon. "There's some sort

of a game up among 'em," he said, "and I can't get to the bottom of it. They are all going south, into the very country where their heads ain't worth twopence a dozen. Your aunt's gone, you know, but she'd go anywhere where there was confusion. She ought to have been christened 'Confusion Silcote,' only the same name would be equally applicable to every member of the family I have ever seen—present company excepted, of course. And Boginsky, he's going, but he'd go anywhere for the sake of mere confusion for its own sake. Old Frangipanni is going, which looks queer; and old Mother Raylock is going; she *may* be in Short's Gardens with her tea-parties and her flowers, and may want to get materials for another novel in her old age. I can account for all of them. But what utterly upsets and shuts me up is this. They are all going, but old Kriegsthurm is *gone*, and took a hundred pounds of mine with him. He never went in '48; he stayed. There's a game up, sir, and my opinion of it is, the Lord help the Pope—Mrs. Morgan, my dear madam, I wish you a good day and a pleasant journey. Be back as soon as you can, for we shall never get on without you now."

She had joined the group while they had been talking, and now, after bowing and smiling round, beckoned James that she was ready. She wore her usual grey clothes, a little prepared for walking, the only addition to her costume being a close grey hood. She started, accompanied by James, at once after a few words of farewell, and those who were left saw the strange pair walk swiftly away together. They saw them skirt the lake, and lost them at the edge of the wood; then they saw them top the highest summit of the moorland, and disappear against the sky.

They had a great pleasure in one another's society, and, although the way was long, and the road rough with frost and snow, it seemed short and cheerful. They talked about many things, she pointing out to him the chances, the dangers, and the glories of his future career as an artist, from time to time, so that he was never bored with her serious talk, but only excited and elevated. Then they talked of the crops, and the soil, and the poor, until, after twenty miles, the lanes began to rise and grow rougher, and Boisey held his beech-crowned head, now delicately silvered with snow, close above them in their path.

"Tired, my dear?" she asked.

"I tired! But how about you? What a splendid walker you are!"

"I have been used to it all my life. I used to walk twenty miles into Exeter at one time. And I walked that road once too often."

“Did you have an accident?”

“An accident? Yes.”

“It has not crippled you. You walk strong and free.”

“I had need. I have a long journey before me, and many things to do by the way; and time gets short.”

“In which direction does your way lead you?”

“That I cannot tell you; I have hardly any idea. It depends entirely on a few people whose wills have always been as unsettled as the sea. You are one of those people. Learn, therefore, to be strong. Take any line you like, but hold to it; and leave me no more of these tangled skeins to set right.”

“But what is your destination in this journey of yours?”

“My destination is the same as your own,—the grave. I have a life to live out, and I am going to try to put certain things right before I die. What things, I scarcely know. How, I do not see. I believe that I may require your assistance. I may or I may not. I cannot see my way as yet. If I require, if I *command*, your assistance, let me find no whimpering, sentimental boy, but a self-possessed, cool-headed man. You are gentle and lovable; I want more than that. I may want you to show your mettle on emergency. Not in fisticuffs, or any rubbish of that sort, but in hard intellectual pluck. There is mischief coming, there is death coming. I have dreamt of fallen angels, still wearing their white garments, being hurled over a high precipice into a deep unfathomable pool of black water by thousands. I know one who wears white still. Never wear white, boy, it shows the bloodstains so openly; whether the blood be Polish, Hungarian, or Italian, it shows all the same. Here is the old short cut, through this gap, you forgetful boy. Turnips this year again: how is that? God help me! my memory must not go yet. Turnips! I must be a year wrong. Wheat, barley, clover, is three, and turnips, wheat, barley, and clover, is four, which is seven. Quite right. And turnips again is eight. And you are turned nineteen, which makes it quite right. Don't you see?”

James did not see at all; but he said, “I will go with you through thick and thin. But I cannot understand what you are speaking about——”

“I hardly understand myself,” she interrupted. “You will probably know more in less than half an hour. But I can say nothing even about that. Don't brush your feet through the turnips like that; lift them over. If you cut away the heart of the turnip with your boots, the frost will get in and destroy the turnip, and if the turnip is destroyed the farmer will suffer; and if the farmer suffers the labourer will suffer more. For the farmer

having no margin, but living from hand to mouth, but feeling the dread, horror, and disgrace of bankruptcy always before him, oppresses the labourer who is undegradable, being in a chronic state of bankruptcy. They used to say that taxes ultimately fall on the producer. They have altered that now, I believe. But remember when—I mean if ever—you come into any property, that every pound spent in luxury represents a loss of seven shillings and sixpence to the wealth of the nation. Look there—there is old Avery, creeping out in the sun. He don't look a bit older. Did ever anybody see the like of that?"

She had totally puzzled James. He could not make anything of her. I hope the reader is only puzzled by her political economy.

"We turn off here," said James.

"The lane is better walking," she answered.

"You have been here before, and you know the people, too," said James, as though he had made a brilliant discovery.

And she said, "Wait. It is inconceivable to me that mere absence should have dulled memory to this extent. Let us see. After all it is a mere psychological question. It does not touch one's heart, or the sentimental part of one, in the least."

In the muddiest part of the muddiest lane, James, in a state of puzzled and wondering submission, stopped her in her rapid walk for a moment.

"I lived here once," he said, and pointed to the old cottage.

She turned, and looked him full and steadily in the face, for her mind was made up now. There was to be no more deceit in her life. She looked him straightly steadily in the face, and merely said, "You lived here once? Does the sight of the old place bring up no memories? Do you remember your mother?"

Not in the least. He looked her straight in the face and answered, "No."

The door was ready for unlocking, but the key was still a quarter of a mile away.

Wending on through the woodlands they came to a part of them where nature began to be slightly assisted by art; laurels and laurustinus began to appear, and after the first wire fence was passed, the signs of order grew more and more visible, until the scarcely marked roadway grew into a gravel-drive, and, joining another and a larger one, which formed the main approach to the house, came to an end.

She walked steadily on in silence through the glades of the densely-timbered deer park, catching glimpses from time to time of the crowded and deep red chimneys and gables of Silcotes. When they were before the porch she spoke again.

"I wonder whether the bloodhounds are loose?"

"You are perfectly safe with me," he answered, still in wonder; and they passed into the old hall.

Here were the dogs grouped round the fire—standing, sitting, and lying, blinking their foolish soft eyes at it. And in the centre of them sat a man of great stature, who was bending thoughtfully over the blaze, with his feet upon the stone hearth on either side of it.

A soldier, as it seemed to James, for he wore the high military collar, and had some sort of silver accoutrements on his back. The dogs seemed fond of him, and one had leaned its great head against his knee.

A slight movement among the dogs, in consequence of their recognising James, caused this man to look round and rise. When James had finished caressing the only one of the lazy animals which had come to meet him, he looked at the man again. He was a soldier of some sort, and was of great height, James saw, and then he suddenly gasped for breath and twitched his arms. His mother stood perfectly silent, looking eagerly on.

It was a strange thing, but he knew his uncle, when he had been quite unable to recognise his mother. James Sugden's face (it was he who stood before James in the dress of a commissionaire) had changed but little in his Crimean campaign; and his mother's had changed so much—not only in appearance, but in expression. As for Sugden, he was the great, peaceful, placid, affectionate giant he had ever been. James, in a startled voice, called him by his old title, and, as he saw the old quiet smile come into his face, he dashed forwards with a shout, and had him by both arms.

"Is mother here?" was his first eager question, when he had looked for half a minute on the dear old face. "Have you brought her?"

"Yes! here she is, old man," said Sugden, turning towards her. James saw no one but Mrs. Morgan, and trembled in every limb. Sugden went and kissed her, and when he saw the two faces together he knew her, and such a rush of emotion, of wonder, of joy, of regret, came on him at once, as could only find expression in a wild, delighted cry.

Hour after hour passed on, and not a servant came near the hall; Silcote had provided against that. Only very distant sounds came feebly on the ear; the bloodhounds slumbered quietly around them; a deep unutterable peace filled the souls of these three so long separated, so happily united, as they sat hand in hand talking in a low and gentle voice before the fire.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WE GET THE ASSISTANCE OF A CHORUS.

It is a common accusation against the English abroad that they herd too much together, and, until they are very well used to it, will avoid the best foreign companionship and society for the sake of a third-class compatriot. It is, no doubt, somewhat true; and it would certainly have seemed true, and been put down as an inseparable accident of the English nation, had M. Assollant happened to be at a certain great ball given at the Russian Embassy at Vienna in the very early spring of 1859.

It was a rather awkward time for every one; for, after the French Emperor's too celebrated "regrets" on New Year's day, which have now become so celebrated as to be a little of a bore, things had been going on from bad to worse. And although Lord Cowley had arrived in Vienna to undertake the somewhat hopeless task of persuading two persons to make peace, both of whom were bent on fighting, it was a more awkward time for the English at Vienna than usual, for it was notorious that three-quarters of the nation had Italian sympathies, and consequently in the coming struggle wished Austria well certainly, but wished Italy better. The French also were extremely unpopular with the English that year, so that really our poor countrymen had not a very pleasant time of it in the Austrian capital, having a strong disinclination to speak to any one they met; and were more than ever inclined to get together. Of course I am only speaking of the rank and file, of the quiet and non-political travellers or residents.

Such quiet people found themselves perfectly comfortable and safe in the society of two people well known as English, and also as sound Austrians; one of the smaller rooms in which these two people had established themselves, seemed to have almost the appearance of an English court, of which they were the king and queen.

They were standing, and very close together. The man was a magnificent giant of a man, a little over forty, with a head of jet black curls, in a white Austrian uniform, rather highly ornamented, with blue tights, which set off his handsome leg to perfection, and boots, fitting also close to his leg, and barely reaching to his calf: a splendid figure, but not such a splendid figure as that of the woman who stood behind him, and whose dress relieved his own so well,—a tall, extremely handsome woman, older than he, but very like him, dressed in a sweeping robe of ruby velvet, and

wearing on her breast a large stomacher of opals. About her neck—as round and as well moulded as the youngest girl's in the room—she had a collar of pearls, and so stood for admiration, which she certainly got, with one well-formed arm hanging loosely upon her velvet, and the other passing affectionately behind her companion, and resting on the cornice behind him.

“Who were they?” some outsiders and foreigners asked, attracted by the sumptuous grace and beauty of the pair who seemed so sought after as their countrymen all of a sudden. “The Princess of Castelnuovo, and her nephew Colonel Silcote, of the Austrian service. Her late husband was an Italian rene—a thousand pardons.” “And who is that exquisitely pretty little English girl, in light blue satin, who seems to be under the protection of Madame the Princess?” “That is the niece of the Princess, Miss Silcote of Silcotes, the great heiress.” To such effect spoke the foreigners. The English conversation of three gentlemen ran somewhat in this way.

These three men had got into a corner together accidentally; and were three rather remarkable-looking men, though quite young. The tallest of the three was a rather pale man, with dark hair and very prominent features; the next in height was pale also, but very handsome. Both of these men looked some ten years older than they were, and spoke in a low and deliberate voice, like men who had been in some way tamed. The third of the group, who always touched the second, was stone blind. The first man was Charles Ravenshoe, the second Austin Elliot, and the third Lord Edward Barty. Charles Ravenshoe had met the other two here, and they were talking together of many things, and lastly of the Princess and her nephew.

“Who are these people, Ravenshoe?” said Austin Elliot, with a ghost of his bright old smile, “and why are they holding a court within a court like this? What the dickens are we doing in this room? Why are *you* here, sir? Eh?”

“Why are you?” said Charles, laughing. “For much the same reason as the rest of us. Because we feel guilty on the subject of politics, and wish to have the countenance of two celebrated Austrian sympathisers.”

“Well, I suppose so. But, once more, who are these people?”

Lord Edward interposed. “They are most remarkable people. I wish I could see the woman.”

“Why?” asked Charles Ravenshoe.

“Because she is a wonderful woman. I have been listening to her conversation, and there is an inconsecutive vacuous fatuity about it which has both astonished and interested me. What

powers of lying that woman must have, with that false unmarked voice, and that false laugh! The woman laughs carefully in fifths. Don't she show her teeth when she laughs? And are they not fine teeth?"

They said, "Yes."

"A good guess for a man who has never looked on the light of heaven. Let me try another. She has either made mischief or will make it—inconceivable mischief. Yet I should get to like her if I knew her. I think I should have guessed that her appearance was splendid even if I had not heard every one saying so around me. What is she like, Austin? You know what I mean, though I never could get music into your head."

"Like a solemn anthem of Purcell or Boyce."

"Tut! Tut! Like 'Pop goes the Weasel.' Charles Ravenshoe's wife would have made a better hit than that. False music there, but a kind woman. A little cracked melody, and no harmony."

"What do you think of the man?" asked Austin Elliot, looking at Charles Ravenshoe.

"Marseillais," answered Lord Edward, shortly. "Knows how to die, but don't know how to live. Who is this little girl who is talking with them, evidently chaperoned by the Princess? A little girl, pretty I hear them say; weasel-faced, as I should guess, with a soprano voice. Might sing up to C in alto if her voice lasted, which it won't. Who is she?"

"The Princess's niece. The great heiress, Miss Silcote."

"Heaven help her husband," said the blind man. "What a fine mess she and her aunt will make with some one before they have done. Austin! Austin! where are you? I cannot feel you in the dark, and something evil is touching me."

Austin Elliot caught him by the arm at once, and apologised to a square-faced, powerfully-built gentleman in a court dress, who had accidentally touched Lord Edward's elbow. "Monsieur," he exclaimed in French, "was blind, and was apt to be nervous at the touch of a stranger."

Lord Edward Barty struck in at once in the same language. "Monsieur is not nervous. But Monsieur knows many more things than people who have their sight."

The courteous stranger passed to the rear of them, and Austin Elliot took Lord Edward Barty to task.

"My dear Edward, you were very rude to that man."

"I don't care," said Lord Edward. "I won't have *canaille* come near me. I live among and love working folks, but I will have no *canaille* about me."

"But how can you tell that he was of the *canaille*?"

"By his touch, you blind man, it by nothing else. By his apologetic shuffling touch; but you cannot understand that. Then by his *smell*; perhaps you can understand *that*."

"My dear Edward, you carry your fancies too far. Your beloved working-men don't smell too sweet on the one hand; and, speaking of your own order, the generation before yours seldom washed themselves."

"I don't care," said Lord Edward. "I only assert that never since the Norman Conquest has any honest English nobleman, or honest English workman, contrived to smell of stale tobacco-smoke, brandy, and patchouli as that man did. But his touch, which you blind folks cannot in your darkness appreciate, was far worse than his smell. Austin, you can tell Ravenshoe that I do not romance about my powers of touch. Now let us hear more of this wonderful pair, who seem, from the conversation I have heard, to be Juno and St. Michael at least."

"I can tell you all about them, except what I don't know," said Charles Ravenshoe; "they live close to my friend Hainault's place at Casterton. To begin with, they are all as mad as hatters."

"You begin to get interesting already," said Austin Elliot.

"Everybody knows everything about these Silcotes," continued Charles Ravenshoe; "but they have erected a theory in their family, that nobody does; or, if forced to allow that any one knows anything, that it is like his impudence. Old Silcote, the Squire of Silcotes, is an absolute and preposterous old Bedlamite, who ought to have been in Littlemoor long ago, but he has an excuse for being mad. His wife was going on in a sad manner in Italy, and he went and fetched her back; and, after he got her home, she tried to poison him, and he found it out. She died—about the best thing she could do; and he went mad—possibly a good thing for him. That Princess there, in the ruby velvet and opals, is his sister, the most transcendent fool in all Europe. She married a Prince Massimo of Castelnuovo, who, in 1848, not only turned traitor in the most rascally manner to the Italian cause, but went off with the young wife of one Count Aurelio Fangipanni, whom I know, and who, take him all in all, is one of the most perfect people in the world. That Princess there and her young husband lived a cat-and-dog life together over this business, until he died; after which she sainted him, kept in mourning for him, spooned over him, and spoons over him to this day. She is a fearful humbug, that woman. Well, in consequence of this attempted poisoning business, and possibly other things, old Silcote refused to recognise her son, now developed into a Puseyite

parson, and put that curly-pated, empty-headed bully, Colonel Silcote, on the throne of the Silcotes. But the curly-headed bully would not do. He was allowed a thousand a year and spent six. He owed ten thousand pounds, and would only confess to three. He was asked to leave the women alone, and he promised that he would, and bolted with a ballet-dancer the week after. He would not do at any rate whatever; the more so as it was perfectly evident that he had contracted a marriage which was binding on him, and, rascal as he was, that he was not inclined to incur any of the penalties for bigamy.

"Old Silcote now put the Silcote crown on the head of the second son by his second wife, who, as I am informed by Miss Raylock, refused it with scorn. If that is the case," said Charles Ravenshoe, "it is the only good I ever heard of him. He is an utterly narrow-minded prig, of the worst Oxford model."

"The stamp of man who rusticated you, for instance," said Austin Elliot.

"Your remark," said Charles Ravenshoe, "is not only coarse and impertinent, but also falls wide of the mark. I am trying to enlarge your little mind, narrowed into smaller limits than even its natural ones, by your worship of this new gospel of Free Trade and Cobdenism. You interrupt me with personalities. I wish to tell you about these Silcotes."

"You can't deny that you set the College on fire, and aimed fourpenny rockets at the Dean's window. It was entirely owing to your evil guidance that that quiet creature Ascot got sent down, you old sinner!" replied Austin Elliot.

"Don't chaff, you two, or at least wait till we get home," said Lord Edward. "I am bored here, and I want to hear more about these Silcotes. That Charles is an old ruffian we all know; we will get more of his confessions out of him, and tell Eleanor if he don't go on."

"Well, then," said Charles Ravenshoe, with a broad smile telling sadly of the old Adam spreading over his features, "I will. This Miss Silcote, the pretty little girl who stands there: shall we have her over the coals? She is not *Miss* Silcote at all, but Miss Anne Silcote. The real Miss Silcote is a Dora Silcote, daughter of the Puseyite parson, who is under a cloud with his father. The real Miss Silcote is most charming, good and sensible; this Miss Anne Silcote is a vixen. They can't do anything with her at all."

"Is she the daughter of the man who rusticated you?" asked Lord Edward.

"Of Arthur, I suppose you mean. No, she is not the prig's

daughter, and he had nothing to do with my rustication, which seems the only one of my good deeds which my friends appear inclined to remember. She is the daughter of another son, who died. Arthur of Balliol is not married. He tried to train a girl to suit his imperial taste, and she nearly met his views. But when, after a year or so, he had brought his powerful mind to bear on the fact that she hadn't got any money, he pitched her overboard; and she, on her part, cut him effectually. Immediately after which she came into eight thousand a year, and turned Papist."

"Bravo!" said Lord Edward.

"This Silcote property is actually enormous. Hainault, a very safe man, and a neighbour of Silcote's—from that reason knowing probably more of his affairs than the idiotic old Bedlamite does himself—puts it at between forty and fifty thousand a year. Now it seems very likely that a considerable number of noses will be put out of joint when he dies. His eldest son and his eldest son's children he is not likely to recognise. That bully of an Austrian colonel standing there before you has tired his patience out by his dissipation and extravagance; Arthur of Balliol has rejected the crown, and has systematically bullied and insulted him: he has an awful tongue, this Arthur. The Oxford fellows who were——"

"Rusticated for setting the College on fire," suggested Austin Elliot.

"I shall have to do violence to this man," said Charles Ravenshoe; "I shall have to fight a duel with this fellow."

There was such a sharp sudden spasm in Austin Elliot's face as he said this that Charles Ravenshoe hurried on, cursing inwardly his wandering tongue.

"I shall have to beat this Elliot here, you know, Lord Edward, or tell his wife about his impudence, or something of that sort: I know I shall. I resume the conversation where he so impertinently interrupted it. This Silcote of Balliol has an inexorably cruel tongue; I know something of what a don's tongue may get to by constant practice. I ought to, if any man ever did. It was said of me once that I went into Collections in my usual health, and came out looking ten years older, and so grey, that I had to send to Spiers for hair-dye. There was a nucleus of truth in that, though a small one. But they say that there was never such a tongue as his. And old Ray—I mean my informant—says that he has used his tongue on his father so long, that the old fool has shown some glimmerings of reason, and got sick of it. So that the money won't go in *that*

direction. We perfectly well know, however, in which direction it will go. The old fellow, having nothing to do except to swear at his grooms and thrash his dogs, found a new amusement. There was a certain old school in London, St. Mary's Hospital, and he, as a governor of it, taking up with Arthur's 'Young Oxford' notions, got it moved into the country, and made a bankrupt old blackguard, one Betts, treasurer of it, Arthur headmaster, and went so far in his iniquitous jobbery as to make his disowned son, Algernon, second master, as a cheap provision for him. And now what has he done to crown all? Why, picked out the brightest and best-looking of the boys in that school and made him his heir."

I suppose that this is the sort of account which will be given of *your* affairs, my dear reader, even in the hands of such a kind and gentle being as Charles Ravenshoe, if you persistently decline to face the world, and make ridiculous mysteries about them, as did Silcote. And I only hope that you may get off so easily, but I doubt it.

A Frenchman had been standing close to Lord Edward Barty all this time, and actually touching him, but Lord Edward had not objected either to his touch or his smell. He was known to both Ravenshoe and Elliot familiarly, and when Charles Ravenshoe had done he nodded his head three times, and said—

"These histories of families are very charming, but, I think, dull. The history of my own family would be very interesting, but also, I fear, dull; save in those portions of it which concern myself. I have listened attentively to my friend Ravenshoe. I understand English perfectly, and have gathered only the idea that the Princess of Castelnuevo yonder was concerned in the poisoning of Ravenshoe's aunt, and that his grandfather had left his whole estate to a boy from the Lycée. These family histories are only tolerable and interesting in novels. I came in here because I was tired of the continual *hauteur* of the Austrians, whom we are shortly going to tie up in a bag and send northward; and since I have been in here I have seen more than you, my Ravenshoe."

"What have you seen?"

"While you have been talking of this Princess, of the bread and butter she ate as a child, of the milk and water she slopped on the floor in her early youth, I have been watching her face. And she has seen the devil."

"By Jove, she looks as if she had," said Charles.

"Can you tell," said the Frenchman, in a whisper, "the direction of eyes? While you were telling your stupid old story

I was watching her eyes, and I saw that she saw the devil. Now in this corner, now in that. Which way are her eyes now?"

"Why, they are straight towards us."

"Then the devil must be close behind us, unless *we* are the devil, a theory which will not stand argument. Thou art no devil, my old foolish Balaclava dragoon, and I am only a devil among the ladies; not in practice, it is only a tradition of your nation about ours. Turn, then, and look at the devil behind us, who has so paled the Princess in the ruby velvet and opals. What makes your blind friend impatient? But there is a smell as of a billiard-marker."

Charles and the Frenchman turned together. Behind them was the square-set gentleman in the English court dress before noticed. The Frenchman laughed and said, "Hah! my friend, art thou this side of the wall, then, this time? Don't cross the centre of the bridge of Buffalora; the arch has given way somewhat, and the bridge might give way, and you might fall in the water. Strike out for the west side if you do. There are Italians, and may be other *canaille*, on the other side. And how do you find *your* trade, my friend? It is a trade which always has paid somehow; and you look sleek enough."

The stout man seemed not overpleased at the recognition, and smiled constrainedly. The next moment he pushed his way between them, and advanced towards the Princess. She in turn advanced rapidly towards him, so that they met together somewhat apart from the other guests; and the Princess was able hurriedly to say, "To-morrow night on the ramparts, opposite the Kaiser Franz Gasthaus," before she led him smiling up to Colonel Silcote, and reminded him of his name, which was totally unnecessary.

Tom Silcote looked on him with anything but good favour. "You are a bold bird, Kriegsthurm," he said in English. "Have you squared with the Government?"

"I am in the employ of his Imperial Majesty, colonel. But my name is Schmitz, if I might be allowed to suggest such a trifle."

"All right," said Tom Silcote. "Do you know, there being no one listening at this moment, not even my aunt, that you are, in my humble opinion, barely wise in being here, now that you have declared yourself so very positively on our side. I wish you nothing but well, as you know, but I think you are indiscreet. I have seen faces about Vienna lately which looked sadly like the old Democratic Committee business. One word is as good as a dozen to a man like you."

"I only ask for one word. Have you seen any one you have ever seen before? Only the one word. Not another, on my honour."

"You shall have it on my honour. Yes."

Kriegsthum still looked pleadingly in Tom Silcote's face, and Tom Silcote answered,—

"Couldn't do it, old fellow. Not even for you."

"Not the first letter, colonel?"

"No. Decency! decency! If I had intended to denounce, I should have done so. You go home early, and keep in the middle of the street. That is all the advice I can give you at present. You have made a great mistake in being here, and declaring yourself so decidedly on the Tedeschi side. You will not be safe from assassination even in London now. Remember the Waterloo Bridge business."

"One word, colonel. Have you seen more than one?"

"I am compromising myself; the English are unpopular here, and I have not done much to aid our popularity. Well, then, yes. More than one, by my observation. More than three dozen, most likely. Are you losing your brain and your nerve, that you ask me such a question? Do you not know,—you, one of the shiftiest conspirators in Europe,—that there is the nucleus of a Democratic Committee in every Hungarian regiment? You must have gone mad, old fellow, before you came here at all. Why the deuce didn't you stay in England? Where is my aunt?"

"She is talking with that long-nosed young booby, Ravenshoe. Time is precious, colonel. I came here to see how things were going, and I wish that I had stayed where I was. I have made a mistake. England is the only place for a conspirator. I say I wish I had stayed where I was. Well, so I do, for some reasons, not for others. You ask me why I came here, and I will honestly tell you: because it is the most dangerous place I could have come to. The dear old fun of conspiracy is so dear to me, that I actually broke with the democratic connexion, and with the Italian and Hungarian connexion, for the mere fun of doing it, of coming here, and declaring for the Tedeschi."

"You will be murdered," said Tom Silcote.

"By whom?"

"By the democrats. Look at Orsini."

"He be blowed. *He* is well out of the way, and all his lot. I never encouraged *him*."

"You did not stop him as you could have done."

"In our trade we never stop any one, we only warn. I warned him, he insulted me, and called me spy; and I let him go."

"At the risk of the French Emperor's life. My dear friend, there is such a thing as morality."

"So they say," retorted Kriegsturm. "I suppose there is. But we can't recognise it in our trade, you know."

"I suppose not," said Tom Silcote.

"A few words more, colonel," said Kriegsturm. "You are terribly in debt, are you not?"

"Pretty well."

"Aunt's fortune pretty near gone with it, I fear?"

"I don't know. She gives me plenty of money, and never grumbles."

"I do, though. And I'll tell you. Your aunt has not got above ten thousand pounds left in money to bless herself with; and you'll soon get through that, you know. But she loves you beyond everything in this world. You allow that?"

"Dear old girl! She does. And I love her, Master Conspirator, as dearly as she loves me."

"Does you credit," said Kriegsturm. "When you, loving her as you do, have finished up her money, you will have to begin on her jewels. And she has sixty thousand pounds' worth of them. You are awfully fond of one another, and love one another to distraction. How long would that love last if you were to ask her to sell one of her jewels for you?"

"Kriegsturm, you are the devil."

"Very near it, I will allow, thank you. You know your aunt, and your aunt's intellect. She loves you, but she would see you in Newgate sooner than part with a single opal or a single yard of lace. I suppose, also, that you know by this time her inexorable obstinacy? Is what I have been stating the truth or is it not?"

"Go away, Aunt. Politics!" said Tom Silcote. And the poor Princess, who was coming to them, went away again and talked to Lord Edward Barty, who afterwards remarked to Austin Elliot that the woman smelt well, and that in ordinary conversation her voice was by no means objectionable.

"I will allow to you," said Tom Silcote, "that all which you say about my aunt is perfectly true. Kriegsturm, let us be plain. You are a great rascal, I fear; but you have a way of inviting confidence which I never saw equalled. I can understand your power among these Nationalists and Democrats."

Kriegsturm laughed.

"I believe that my aunt loves me better than any human being, but yet I know that she would die of starvation, and see me die at her side, sooner than part with one of her geegaws. Why?"

"Because she is as mad as a March hare," answered Kriegsturm.

"You Silcotes, one and all of you, have just stopped on the verge of madness, and even she has not *legally* overstepped it. There are many such families: and they are generally, I should say almost always, brilliant and successful. It has not been the case in your family, I allow, because you seem to have arrived at that average when you are both too sane and too mad for success. All that is the matter with your aunt is, that she is the fool of the family; the maddest of the whole lot. Just look at her, will you? Look at her frantic extravagance in dress, and look at her curious investment in jewels. No one ever saw before such a quaint combination of extravagance and prudence. Of money—and, indeed, of money's worth—she knows little or nothing; but she understands jewels, and her hoarding instinct takes the form of jewels. Her human instincts take the form of sainting her late husband (as bad a rogue as me) and loving you. But she would see you in Newgate before she would sell a diamond for you, and you know it."

"Well, leave my aunt alone."

"For the present," said Kriegsturm. "She is mad, and I have made a mint of money out of her folly. Such men as you and I, colonel, needn't mince matters together. We know too much for that. What I am driving at, as a practical man, is this. *She* will spend cash on you till it is all gone; but then?"

"I have my profession, and my position as an Austrian colonel."

"Oh, if you swells would only speak out! Just once in a way for a change."

"Well, then, I confess that, if I was reduced to my pay, I should have to live closer than I should like."

"*Pre-cisely*. Now, to prove that I am more of a business man than yourself, what will you stand, if, through my instrumentality, you were installed as master of Silcotes, with forty thousand a year?"

"I think," said reckless Tom, "that I would stand a thousand a year."

"Good! That is what you would stand. Now what would you stick at—murder?"

"I should stick at murder, decidedly. In fact, if you will gather the impudence to repeat the proposition, I will kick you out of the room, as a general measure, not in the least regarding consequences. I confess myself an ass—my life has proved it; and I know you to be a great rascal—your life has proved it. And again to turn the proposition over, I am little better than a rascal, and you most assuredly are an ass, to have hinted such a thing to me."

"Who is the ass?" said Kriegsturm scornfully. "There are but two of us here talking together, and if one of us is an ass, it is not myself. You speak to me as though I proposed murder. I did nothing of the kind. I asked you only whether you would stick at murder to gain Silcotes. Would you? I do not believe that you would. See here, colonel. I am getting old, and shall some day, when my vitality is less, get tired of the old political conspiracies. And they *lead* to nothing; at least to nothing I care about. I shall want a new sphere for my talents. If I can get you Silcotes, will you give me a thousand a year?"

"I should like Silcotes well enough," answered the colonel, "but it is beyond your power. And, after this singular escapade of yours in coming to Vienna and declaring for us, you are safe nowhere."

"I will bet you," said Kriegsturm, "that I am back in London in six months, with the full confidence of the whole National and Democratic parties in Europe, if you like, in spite of my present indiscretion and declaration. *You* don't know what fools those continental Democrats are."

"Well, walk in the middle of the street while you are here. As for Silcotes, if you can ever show me that you got me Silcotes, you shall have your thousand a year off the rent roll. But we are going to fight; and—who knows?"

"You are going to fight, colonel, and are going to get beat. You will have had soldiering enough after this bout."

"Going to get beat, hey," thought Colonel Silcote. "If you ever spoke the truth in your life, you spoke it then."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE RAMPARTS.

It was a very calm spring night, and the ramparts were very quiet. The scent which came from the fast subsiding Danube, was no longer the coarse rough smell of mud, but the oxygenated scent of fresh springing vegetation. Nature was hastening to repair the damage of her winter's ill-temper; but certain tramlings of sentries and guards more numerous than usual, and more than those, the low, growling rumble of the waggons of the military train already creeping southward, showed clearly enough, to those who had ears

which could understand sounds, that man was about to begin his career of destruction as soon as nature was peaceful enough to allow him.

It was a wide rampart, from which you saw a plain, and beyond, very quiet peaceful hills: a very quiet and peaceful wind came quietly from those hills across the river, and raised a few whispers in the trees upon the rampart. The country there is not a cruel country. Nature is more than half kind; it is only plagued by kings and dynasties. The people are a quiet, law-fearing people enough, coming of a good stock; and the land is a better land than one-half the United States or nine-tenths of Australia. But they are plagued by dynastic traditions, and so it is an uneasy land, and a land almost as ill to live in, for all its beauty, as Calabria with its constantly recurring earthquakes.

However, at this time of night the Emperor was asleep or dancing, and the gentle wind came peacefully and kindly from the hills beyond the river. It said nothing of the things which it had seen there, of the students who had defended that very place in 1849; nothing of the entrance of gaudy honest Jellachich; nothing of the midnight fusillades which followed it. It had never known, or it had forgotten. It merely wandered like a gentle hand over the face of our old friend the Princess, and said quietly, "Peace!"

And she heard it: low as her instincts were, she heard that. The world and her life had always been to her an ugly great confusion, which she felt, more by instinct than by reason, that she could not set right—a confusion of hopelessly tangled iron cordage, with here and there a single silver wire. She had always seized the ends of these silver wires, and with weak hands, but with the obstinacy of a mule, had tried to unravel them from the mass of inexorable iron cordage which was too strong for her. In other words, she was a feeble, almost silly, woman who had been educated by washy Continental politicians of a certain school not entirely unrepresented in our model country, until she believed that intrigue was strength. "Leave my aunt alone," said Colonel Silcote. Well, we will, when we have done with her. We must notice these things, however. She never knew what she was going to do next. There were two or three things in this world which she wanted done, and would fight to the death to get done. Beyond these things she had no policy whatever except this—opposition: the putting of spokes in all kinds of wheels which seemed to be turning, for fear the circle should not come round in the way in which she wished it. Not having any intellect, and knowing it; only wishing for a few things, and knowing that also, her policy was obstructive. She denied everything to which she did not see

her way, and only admitted the facts which would serve her small purposes provisionally.

The poor fool had been a child once, and was getting oldish and childish again now. She had always been blindly striving against some things she understood, and others which she did not, but only dreaded because she could not understand. She had striven, for instance, with the utmost persistency, in the saving of her own character, and had saved it : had spent her cash (while she hoarded her jewels) for Colonel Silcote ; and had striven blindly and persistently against all strangers, and all strange ideas, lest the fact that she was the proximate cause of the ruin of her brother's life should in any way become known to her brother.

She had been always blindly restless, and now she began to want peace and oblivion—an escape from all this miserable confusion which was getting deeper confounded on her day by day. Her case was very pitiable. Thirty years or more of her life had been framed more or less on a frightful lie, the full iniquity of which she had only learnt recently. She had spent the most of her money. Her terror of her brother's learning the truth was as strong as ever ; and she desired peace—desired to escape the consequences of her own folly.

Some escape and some do not. Half-witted woman as she was, she had brains enough to see that some people, in this world at least, escape from the consequences of their own actions. She hoped she might be one of those lucky people, and she prayed for it. The Popish form of Christian faith began to have great attractions for her, as it had had for Miss Lee under very different circumstances. It promised peace, and she wanted peace. She had prestige and position as the principal Protestant lady in Vienna. But the Jesuits promised her greater things ; and the Jesuits are good paymasters. They give what they promise. They give peace to fools.

She wanted peace. She had been fearfully indiscreet with Sir Godfrey Mallory, in the very old times, and she had allowed Kriegsthum to blind her brother, of whom she was terribly afraid, by innuendoes against Silcote's own wife. I have done my business badly, if you have not understood this before. This was a terrible crime. Poor, gentle, good Mrs. Silcote would have died from this accusation alone if it had been ever made to her. But she died a perfectly puzzled woman, entirely without knowledge or suspicion of evil. She had been very carefully brought up, and the idea of unfaithfulness to her husband was one which she never could have understood. The mere suspicion of such a thing, the mere mixing up of his wife's name with that of Sir Godfrey Mallory,

had made Silcote a brute. The unmentionable accusation against her, brought afterwards, had maddened him. It was inconceivable to him, as it is to us, and as it was to Mrs. Thomas, when he told her of it. But he believed it—it was so well put.

By whom? By Kriegsturm, a man who knew the art of conspiracy. The Princess had trusted the whole business to his management; he was a thorough-going man, and she paid him well, and he went a little beyond his instructions.

His excuse to the Princess of Castelnovo was this: that his instructions were vague, and that he had to act on his private judgment; that something stronger was wanted to counteract Silcote's uxoriousness to his wife than mere accusations; that he took stronger measures.

She had always dreaded to ask him what he had done after she saw the terrible consequences of it. But a short time before, he, for the purpose of showing her how deeply they were committed together, had told her the whole wicked story, and she had fled from him in terror.

Oh that he were dead, or that she were dead! She was a kind, a very kind, woman in her way. The distress of others was unbearable to her. And now that she had at last realised what had really been done through her means, her terror and distress were extreme. To-night, in this quiet place, for the first time since she had known everything, she had got into a softer and gentler mood. After a few turns up and down, she bent her head down upon the parapet, and wept long and bitterly.

The gentle wind blowing over the graves of the piled thousands of slain at Aspern told of peace and rest in quiet country churchyards, where the dead keep one another solemn company through low whisperings of the summer night. How calm all those dead lay out there at Aspern, Austrian and Frenchmen!——

Her quiet and gentle meditations were interrupted, and her face grew hard, and potentially wicked again. Kriegsturm stood beside her.

CHAPTER XL.

THEY MAKE ALL KINDS OF PLANS.

“CONFOUND and confuse the dogs!” (it was something worse in reality) cried out the Squire, picking himself up from among them; “I have broken my arm.”

He had not, to relieve the reader’s anxiety. All that had happened was this. He had been going through an interview with his steward, stud-groom, and butler in his study, and had got into a most abominable temper with all three of them, for no earthly reason. He had left them, scolding, and had scolded so loud (gone away “hobbling and cussing” said the butler), that the bloodhounds had heard him coming, and had prepared to welcome him by standing and sniffing at the door by which they knew he would enter. Consequently Silcote, bursting into the hall in King Cambyses’ vein, tripped up over the foolishlest and boldest puppy, and came headlong down among three hundred weight and three hundred pounds’ worth of useless and stupid dog-flesh, and hurt his elbow. The dogs immediately licked his face; all except the junior dog, who was damaged by his fall, and boo-hooped away with his grievance into the chimney-corner.

“I wish the confounded dogs were dead,” he said, raising himself up. “*They* are eating me out of house and home, and I am being swindled and cheated out of house and home. I have broken my arm, I hope. I should like to have broken my arm; it would give me prestige again. I wish I had the typhus fever; they would all come flocking back again fast enough then, to see about the will. I am perfectly certain that I am being cheated right and left by those three, but I can’t prove it, and they ain’t a bit afraid of me. I never should get a civil word from anybody now, even if anybody were here; but they have all run away from me. I have hurt that puppy, though. I must go and see after him. Ban! Ban! What is it, old fellow? Hang the dog, he is sneaking away! Go to Italy, you ungrateful whelp! Lor, what an ass I have been on the whole!”

“You never said a truer word than that,” said Mrs. Tom’s voice at his elbow. She had heard him scolding along the passages, and was advancing to open the door for him, when he burst in and tumbled over the dogs.

“Hullo!” said he, looking somewhat foolish; “so you are there, Madam Tongue, are you!”

"Here I am, tongue and all," she replied, "with a very ugly black crow to pick with you, Squire."

"Well, go on, then, and pick it," said Silcote: "you are all against me, now. Go on. Scold yourself into quiescence, like any other woman: if you scold yourself into hysterics, I'll not raise a hand to bring you out of them."

"Don't be ungentlemanlike," said Mrs. Thomas. "I don't allow it. Keep your temper for your dogs. I will have none of it."

"So *you* have turned against me, have you?"

"Yes, strongly. You have deceived me grossly. You knew perfectly well about my succession to this great property. You are the only man, except my brother, who knew where I was. You withheld your information, and have deceived me grossly."

"You are one of the most perfectly foolish persons," said Silcote, "that I ever met in my life."

Her own habit of "hitting out," retorted on herself so singularly, made her pause in answering. Before she answered he was at her again.

"You love to call me a fool. It keeps your tongue in order. But in my worst times I never was so foolish as you. I knew that you had come into this 4,000*l.* a year some time ago, but I kept the knowledge of it from you. I loved you, and I love you; but *you have no settlements*, and he could use it. And he would gamble it away in less than a year. He is in the Austrian army, and—they are going to fight."

"You would not have him dead?" she asked, and began walking rapidly up and down the hall.

"Not I. I only reminded you that he will have the spending of your money, and will spend it; and then your boy will be dependent entirely on me, who am half-fool and half-madman, according to your account. You and your boy are, in reality, at my mercy if you declare yourself. And then you irritate me, and make me dangerous."

"How often am I to tell you that I am not afraid of you. I see that it was in kindness to me that you practised this deceit on me, and advised my brother to do the same. Well, I forgive you; let there be peace."

"I have no objection," growled the Squire. "I don't want to have any row. I act for the best and then I catch it. It is a grateful world, this. I have let my servants do pretty much as they please, and I know I am being cheated right and left."

"Serve you right for tempting them. You had much better leave this for a time and come with me, to help me in my work."

“What may that be?”

“Trying to reclaim my husband, and righting the memory of your wife.”

“Giving four thousand a year to a gambler to spend, and disinheriting your own son. For, if matters are cleared up, Algernon is my heir. In such an utterly foolish errand you are quite right to select the greatest fool of your acquaintance; and I am that fool. I am complimented by your selection, and join you with pleasure.”

“Had not you better go to bed for a few hours?”

“Why?”

“Because you are in one of those fits of silly cynical ill-temper which the folks hereabouts call your ‘dark moods.’ Try and sleep it off. Go to bed, that’s a good man.”

There must be some truth in some kind of homœopathy—though in this case the dose was anything but infinitesimal—for the effect of her sarcastic scorn matched against his was most beneficial. The humour displayed on both sides was small, but hers neutralized his. He stamped up and down for about a minute, and then, saying aloud, “Confound the woman! I would have disinherited Tom ten years sooner if I had known he had married such a shrew,” looked up at her laughing.

She knew when she had gained her object, and when to stop. She laughed also, and said, with only the ghost of an emphasis on the “now” (she was too much of a woman to forego *that*)—

“Now, my dear father-in-law, we will talk business.”

To which he answered, “I will do everything you can possibly desire if you will only stay by me. I must not part from you.”

“You shall not. Let nothing part us. My duty is with you, Silcote; but there are conditions; nay, only one.”

“Let us have it.”

“That we two do right, nothing but right, and most inexorably right, in following out our bargain; and that we utterly disregard consequences of all sorts and kinds.”

The Squire loitered into the porch, and she followed him for her answer.

“How splendid the crocuses are this spring,” he said first; “and that daphne too, in full bloom so early. Do you know the scent of the daphne; the most rich, glorious, overpowering scent in the world, to which that of the magnolia seems like a grocer’s spices? How do the storms and frosts of a bitter northern winter develop such a pure sweet scent as that?”

“Go, cut me a sprig of it, and bring back your answer with it.”

He went, smiling, and did as she told him. He held the beautiful pink, rich-scented bough to her face, and as he did so kissed her on her forehead, and said, “I agree.”

“Let me understand to what.”

“To the righting of all previous wrongs without regard to consequences. To doing the right henceforth. On a condition.”

“What condition?”

“That you are not to dictate exactly what is right and what is wrong without consultation with me.”

“Well,” she said, “I will agree to that for two reasons. The first is, that if you allow discussion I shall always have my own way, and the second is, that the difference between right and wrong was settled immovably before Adam and Eve appeared on the earth, and that you and I know the difference between them, which some don’t. I have another thing to say to you.”

“Well?”

“I wish to be very tender and delicate about it, dear Silcote, but I am a coarse and rough-spoken woman. I spoke roughly to you about it in my room at St. Mary’s, a little while ago, but I will speak roughly to you no more. We are allied. You wish your wife righted, and *you wish to know yourself that she is righted.*”

The poor Squire leant against the porch, and looked out into the woods for a little time before he answered.

“I think so. I think that I could bear the horrible burden of my most hideous and ghastly mistake better if it was demonstrated to me by undoubtable evidence. I think so. I am a lawyer, and have been accustomed to examine evidence, and the evidence against her was frightfully strong. Your sentimental special pleading has done more than made me doubt; I have acquitted her often and often, but not always. In my darker moods I doubt again. I think that I would rather have it cleared up without doubt; so that she and I might stand clear, the one before the other; that I might ask her forgiveness with no cloud of doubt between us. In my present mood, while I am with you, I believe her to be an innocent, deeply-wronged woman; and I wish her proved so—in my present mood.”

“But we are going to have none of the old moods, Silcote, are we?”

“None! None! But you see the nameless misery and despair which the clearing of her character would—*would* be confounded—*will* bring on me. She was trusted to me, she trusted herself

to me, and I murdered her. Can you wonder that I want your noble strength to help me through? But I will go through with it—if you will only stand by me—to the death.”

“God help you, my poor Silcote! God help you! Do you never pray?”

“Not I. I pray. I’ll pray to her for forgiveness.”

“Could you not cast yourself on God?”

“I am too old, I expect. I did not begin soon enough, I suppose.”

“It is not too late.”

“You are a good woman, but women don’t understand that sort of thing. Arthur is the priest of the family. I had him bred for it. When I want a priest I’ll send for Arthur, and endure his tongue, which is a sharp one. I paid for his education as a priest, and I have a right to his services. I don’t like the amateur style of business at all, neither in law nor divinity. An attorney’s clerk may air his opinions before a police magistrate with success, just as you may have your amateur notions about theology. But Arthur has eaten his dinners, so to speak, and you haven’t. In either of the professions of Law, Physic, or Divinity, I go in for the regular practitioner against the quack.”

“We must leave this greatest business of all alone, then, for the present, and trust to God. Now, have you any proofs? Will you put them in my hands? May I open this black box in your bedroom?”

“You may go and get it.”

“You are not angry with me again?”

“May God bless you, my dear. I angry with you? Go and get the box, and let us have it over.”

She went, and returned with a little black despatch-box. Silcote was gone when she returned, but soon came back, explaining that he had been for the key. It was a rusty key, not used apparently for a long time. He opened the box with it, and the box was empty!

They looked at one another for a few moments in blank astonishment, and then Mrs. Thomas Silcote burst out laughing. Silcote himself did not laugh, but looked seriously and sadly at her.

She laughed long and heartily, and when she spoke, said, “Laugh with me, my dear father-in-law, I pray you. There is serious work before us, which we must see out together; but laugh now at the absurd side of the business, just once in a way. You and I shall not have much to laugh at for a long time: let us laugh at this.”

"I cannot."

"I can, and I'll tell you why. Because here is the darkest, deepest mystery of all: this great Silcote complication come to an end in an empty morocco despatch-box with a morocco lining, and nothing at all in it. This is the *dénouement* of the great Silcote plot or mystery which has darkened and rendered useless your life for forty years or so. It was through this that you took to keeping your bloodhounds, now as amiable and as foolish as yourself. It was through this that you cut yourself off from society, and made yourself a marked man in the county, delighting in your evil name with all the ostentation of a real Silcote (*roturiers* as you are). This is the very box on which you told me the devil danced every night as soon as you put out your candle. What a clever devil it must have been to dance on the empty box, while you were routing in bed, and maddening yourself about its contents!"

"Steady with that tongue of yours, my dear," said Silcote "Steady! Steady!"

"I beg pardon," she said; "I beg a hundred pardons. I thought I had got it in order, but you see I have not as yet. My excuse is that anything theatrically false irritates me, as far as I can be irritated. Your life has been a theatrically false one, and I laugh when I see that it gets a little ridiculous in the end. Well, well. There is work before the pair of us, and I will curb my tongue; and I will not laugh any more. With regard to this preposterous box, on which the devil danced: what was in it?"

"The letter which accused my wife of trying to poison me."

"Hah! and it is there no longer," said Mrs. Thomas. "What a thing for a play! And what was this document like?"

"I will tell you something," said Silcote.

"Do," she said, "and I will laugh no more. The farce of the thing is over, and the tragedy is coming. You and I shall want all our wits. My daily thoughts reappear in my nightly dreams, and always I see the white trampled under by the red and blue."

"But the white will win this time."

"No, no."

"We ought to be there, daughter, if you think so."

"We ought to be there, father, for I do think so. What is this 'something,' which you were going to tell me?"

"About this accusation which was in that now empty box. It was clumsily forged to imitate my sister, the Princess's, handwriting. I always knew it was not hers, but I suspected she had something to do with it: that is the reason of our estrangement."

"And of the bloodhounds, and, to put it mildly, of your

behaviour to society generally. If you had gone in for writing a play or a novel, I can conceive that you might have resorted to a ridiculous sort of mystery. As it is you are without excuse. Why did not you have it out with her like a man? But I am dumb. I promised to curb my tongue, and I will."

"At what particular period of the future," growled out Silcote, "do you mean to curb your tongue? I should like to know, because, if you would fix the date, I would deprive myself of the pleasure of your company till it came due. If you will stop your tongue—not that I hope for any such happiness—I will tell you the remainder of my something."

"Go on. I will be quiet."

"Do. Well, then, my poor sister has stolen this accusation from me. She has thought that I believed that it was really in her handwriting, and she has violated my despatch-box and carried it away. Do you understand?"

"I do *not* understand. I am neither a novelist, a barrister, nor a play writer, and I do *not* understand. I *know* this. That you, who, as a lawyer, ought to have made all things clear, seem in your particular way to have confounded things more deeply. Your foolish sister has scarcely with her active mendacity confounded things more than you have by your foolish reticence. But we ought to go and see after it, you and I. A woman who could rob her brother's despatch-box is capable of a good deal of mischief. You and I ought to go and look after matters."

"You have sent for your cousin here, have you not?"

"Yes. I thought it best. I can't trust you out of my sight. Miss Lee comes to-morrow or next day. Where is Arthur? We must not have a meeting here. Is he really gone abroad?"

"Yes, he is actually gone. He is really ill. Dr. F—— has sent him to Boppard. He wanted to stick to his work at the school, but Dr. F—— would not have it. If you and I go south, we must pick him up by the way. Arthur irritates and bullies me at times, but I love Arthur and you better than any others in the world. As for Thomas, your husband, my dear, he has worn my love out, as he did yours."

"I don't know *that*," said she; "there are some people so intensely agreeable that they may sin till seventy times seven. There are but few of them, and you are not one; but I doubt Tom is."

A very few words are necessary to explain that the legal recognition of Mrs. Thomas Silcote as Mrs. Sugden had been easily made, and that Miss Lee received her cousin with open arms. Silcote had rather fought shy of meeting his daughter-in-

law for a short time, in consequence of the little deceit he had used towards her. He thought that he was wise, in keeping the knowledge of her wealth from her, until he knew her mind about Tom. He thought that there could be no harm in procrastination. In this case it meant ruin.

CHAPTER XLI.

BUT FINDING THEMSELVES RATHER COMFORTABLE, DAWDLE
ABOUT THEIR EXECUTION.

"How do I look?" said the Squire to Mrs. Thomas, as they walked together up and down the hall, waiting for the arrival of Miss Lee.

"You don't look as well as I expected. You look something like a very pugnacious Quaker and still more like a prize-fighter who has turned Quaker. The change is not a success."

"It was your suggestion."

"I am aware of it, but the cleverest of us make mistakes at times. They are not a success, and must be changed. Give them to the butler."

"They cost six pounds, you know."

"That is a matter of indifference. I will not have you look like a radical grocer. The old grey smallclothes and gaiters were better, bad as they were. You *ought* to know how to dress like an ordinary gentleman, but you don't."

"Go on."

"I am going on, if you will not interrupt me. I wanted you to look well to-day, and you are a perfect figure. When I told you to get a suit of dark clothes from your London tailor, I did not mean you to come out like a tectotal share-jobber. You look as if you had been dressed by a *costumier*, not by a real tailor. Did you get your clothes from Nathan's? You don't know how ill they become you. I take all the blame, however. She is nearly due now."

Mrs. Thomas had persuaded, or rather ordered, the Squire to dress himself in a way becoming to his age; and he had followed her advice. The result was such as she described it. She was, possibly, slightly acid in temper over this failure in her judgment;

the more so, perhaps, because her law of inexorable honesty bound her to confess it.

Very soon after one of the Squire's newest carriages came whirling up the drive, and pulled up at the door. This contained Miss Lee herself. Her maid, her man (sedatest of men), her boxes, and the rest of her goods were coming in a separate spring-cart appointed for such purposes. In this carriage was only herself and a few of her more indispensable surroundings—such as her muff, her magazine (*Fraser's*: *Macmillan's* had not yet beamed on the world), and a travelling-bag with gold fittings, for which she had given a hundred guineas or so, and without which she could no more travel than could poor Marie Antoinette without her ivory and rosewood *nécessaire*.

No more sliding in the streets now, Miss Lee; no more talking to the policeman; no more buying periwinkles in the street, and eating them with a pin as you walked along; no more skirmishing and fighting with the pupils. She had accepted her new position so cleverly and so well that it had become part of herself. The real Miss Lee was the splendid heiress; the old boisterous governess was but a sort of eidolon which had been allowed for purposes to represent on earth the real article with the gold-topped dressing-bag. Nothing remained of the old one but her splendid beauty, her old independent ways which enabled her to do without a companion, and a habit of looking somewhat steadily at any person, either male or female, whom she wished to examine, without always considering what their thoughts on the subject might be: which last habit made some folks call her bold-looking. These were the only remains now visible of the periwinkle-and-policeman period.

The Squire—who *was* a gentleman, or, at all events, believed himself to be so—was greatly to be pitied on this occasion. He had been carefully warned by his daughter-in-law that Miss Lee—whatever she *might* have been at one time, however much she might have degraded herself by being a governess in the Silcote family—had been born and bred a lady, and was now a very fine lady indeed. Silcote, with the continually-growing, sneaking consciousness on him of having made a fool of himself for nearly forty years, remembered that he had not met a lady for all that time in familiar intercourse. He had cast it over in his mind how he should behave to her, and had come to the conclusion that it should be the Grandison heavy father, with a dash of the frank old English country gentleman. He had dressed for the part, and had so far rehearsed the part as to put his hands in his waistcoat pockets, stretch his legs apart, and feel himself prepared, when

the emergency came, to talk in a voice like that of Mr. Paul Bedford, in what is called, I believe, a "genteel part." He had dressed for that part under his daughter-in-law's directions, and thought that he could get through it very well; but, just as he was, so to speak, going to walk on the stage, this faithless woman had taken all the wind out of his sails, and utterly ruined his nerve, by telling him that he looked like a prize-fighting Quaker: which might be true, but was not agreeable.

Still he determined to go through with his rôle. Feeling as if he was dressed in his butler's clothes, he advanced to the carriage-door to receive Miss Lee. And it may seem curious to an unthoughtful person, Miss Lee *took* him for his butler, looked calmly over the top of his head, handed him her hundred guinea travelling-bag, dismounted, and said—

"Show my people where to put my things when they come. Take that *couvre-pieds* out of the carriage, will you? Don't let it go into the stable-yard. Are your master, or Mrs. Morgan, at home?"

For Mrs. Morgan was not yet announced as Mrs. Thomas Silcote.

This little *contretemps* put the Squire at his ease and in good humour immediately. Mrs. Thomas heard the dialogue, and joined in the joke.

"My master is at home, Miss," said the Squire, "as also is Mrs. Morgan. There are no further orders, Miss?"

"I think not," said Miss Lee. "My man is to go into the steward's room, not into the servants' hall. My maid, of course, goes into the housekeeper's room. That is all, I think. Where is your mistress—I mean, where is Mrs. Morgan? Do these great dogs, which your master chooses to keep, bite?"

"No, Miss," said Silcote; "do nothing but sleep now. Sometimes they get the steam up sufficiently to bark, but not often."

"Drive them back. My dear creature" (to Mrs. Thomas who approached), "how are you? Make the butler drive these dogs away. And where is Grandpère le Terrible? And how is *he* getting on? And how are you?"

"Drive your dogs off, butler," said Mrs. Tom, laughing, "and come in, my dear. This butler here is a character, and we allow him all kinds of liberties. You must know him better. I assure you he is a character."

"He looks very stupid," said Miss Lee, not intending him to hear her; but he heard her notwithstanding. His eyes twinkled with fun (excuse a worn out old simile, it will serve our purpose),

and he was going to say something funny, but did not, because Mrs. Thomas anticipated him.

"He is very stupid, my dear," she said aloud. "His stupidity is a plague to us. But ought you not to see Silcote?"

"I suppose I must. I dread it of all things, but I suppose I must, sooner or later. He has a dreadful tongue, I am told."

"He has a terrible tongue. It is a terrible thing to offend Silcote. Here he is."

Silcote came up, and bowed to Miss Lee. "Bless you, sir," she said, "I always thought that you were such a terrible person. I don't fancy that I shall be a bit afraid of you. I took you for the butler."

"My bark is worse than my bite, Miss Lee."

"He is all bark and no bite," said Mrs. Thomas.

"And I have a dutiful daughter-in-law, Miss Lee, who holds me up to ridicule on every occasion," said Silcote.

"And he has a tongue which does not always tell the exact truth," said Mrs. Thomas. "I never hold him up to ridicule, save when he makes himself ridiculous."

"Do you know," said Miss Lee, "that you two people seem to me already to spar a great deal too much?"

"We shall finish our sparring when we are both in the churchyard, but our love will live on," said Silcote.

"That may be," said Miss Lee, "but I don't like sparring myself. If you go on eternally wearing at the outside edge of love, you may get to the love some day, and kill *that*. I don't say that it will happen between such a pair of rhinoceroses as you two; I don't think it ever will. But it is a bad habit, this sparring. I am going to live with you, and I wish to say that you ought to leave it off towards one another, and certainly never try it on me."

"But we love one another, the father and I," said Mrs. Thomas.

"You do at present. You have not seen one another much, you know, and you have both had your troubles. You have been thrown together with every chance of being hearty, mutually assistant friends for life. And I come here, and I have not been ten minutes in the house before I find you whetting your tongues against one another, to see which tongue is sharpest. Believe me that it is not well."

"You speak well, cousin," said Mrs. Thomas. "Where did you learn this?"

"Have you studied shrewdness of tongue, that you have lost shrewdness of brain? I have told you everything."

“You mean Arthur.”

“I mean Arthur. I loved that man until he wore through the outside crust of my love. I submitted to him and flattered him—what could I do else? he was the noblest creature I had ever seen—until he wore through the outside crust of my love with his bitter sharp speech, and got to the core of my love, a love which came from the admiration of his innate nobleness; I can express it no better. My soul was his for a time; what did he do with it? Everything I did wrong was wrong without excuse: everything I did right was done from contemptible motives, which he analysed in the bitterest manner.”

And the good-humoured gentle girl made peace between them, kept this object before her, and fought for it. There was some sort of tacit arrangement between her, her cousin, and the Squire that she was to stay on there. It was one of those arrangements which seem made by the instinct more than the intellect: I doubt if the arrangement ever got as far as articulate words. Yet something to this purpose must have passed between her and Mrs. Thomas, when the latter lady presented herself to claim her moiety of the property. Probably they only fell in love with one another, as women do. But, when Miss Lee came to Silcotes, she brought an enormous number of boxes, and, after having heard that Arthur was ordered away for his health, put her servants in London on board wages, and sent for some more boxes. And meanwhile there grew in all three of them an indisposition to hurry themselves in moving.

The Squire and his daughter-in-law found out the very first day what she was. A gentle, genial, amiable, and clever woman, with plenty of character, and a most charming temper. Before the week was out both these rugged souls had felt the influence of her gentleness and her beauty, and ceased their rude words towards one another. They broke out at times, but Miss Lee, with her kindly laughter, laughed them both down. For what can the most radically rugged nature do against a splendidly beautiful woman, *beautifully dressed and jewelled* (that is not the least part of it, or *Sartor Resartus* was written in vain), who shows the geniality of radicalism with none of its acerbity? She was as radical and as uncompromising as either of them, but she was never in the least degree Berserk. She saw that the old wild spirit was still in both of them, in Silcote always ready to break first, in Mrs. Thomas at times difficult to repress. She saw her work before her, and she did it. She calmed and quieted them both. They had both, particularly Mrs. Thomas, far stronger natures than hers. She knew it, and she knew that her strength

lay in gentleness : and she used that strength, and did her work well.

Did she still love the man who had first taught her and trained her ; or, to put it in another way, had taught her to teach and train herself ? Did she still love Arthur ?

Yes, not to make a mystery of the story, she did ; let her say what she liked. But she knew Arthur's honest pride so well, that she knew that he would never come to *her*. She was ready to go to *him*. Only she waited until she could find out, by a side wind, whether his love for her had lasted. For she knew that he had loved her once. He had behaved ill and selfishly to her, but she knew that he had loved her once. A woman, they say, generally knows when a man loves her.

Miss Lee had arrived at Silcotes on Monday. By Saturday her influence had been felt, and the other two had got to love her. Still there had been no explanations, beyond some talk about their mutual inheritance, which mainly turned on a conspiracy between them to deprive the lawyers of their natural rights, and avoid law. Silcote himself was funny over this part of the business, and was in favour of a friendly suit between the cousins, for the benefit of the lawyers. He himself, he said, would take the brief of either party ; and, give him his choice of attorneys, would, for a small bet, leave either of them or both of them without a farthing. He, however, ultimately managed the law part of their little business for them most admirably.

On the Saturday evening Mrs. Thomas observed to Miss Lee, "I have ordered the carriage for you to-morrow morning."

"The carriage ! why ?" said Miss Lee.

"To go to Marlow. There is no mass at Newley, and there will not be for all the next month. Father Protheroe is ill, and——"

"Mass !" interrupted Miss Lee ; "what do I want at mass ?"

"My dear, I thought you were Catholic ; I beg your pardon," said Mrs. Thomas.

"We call ourselves Catholic, certainly," said Miss Lee, "when we don't call ourselves Anglo-Catholic, which somebody used to tell me was only more ridiculous. I am not a Romanist."

"I thought you were."

"Nothing of the kind. I am what they would call very High Church, I suppose ; and you are not innocent there. I am going to church with you and Silcote to-morrow morning. Silcote goes to church, of course ?"

"Silcote would see himself a long distance off first," remarked that gentleman. "I may be a brute, but I am not a humbug."

Boxed up in an apology for a sheep-pen for an hour and a half, and then hearing a man in a box talking platitudes which you can't contradict for another half-hour. No ! ”

Mrs. Thomas was preparing herself to go about with him on this view of the matter, when Miss Lee waved her hand and interposed.

“ But you are coming with us to-morrow morning, Silcote,” she said.

“ Did I not say that I would see myself a long way off first ? ” he answered.

“ Yes,” said Miss Lee, “ but then you know that involves an absurdity ; because you know you could not possibly see yourself at a long way off, and you will come with us to-morrow morning, won't you ? ”

“ To hear old Sorley's platitudes ? ” said Silcote.

“ To worship with your fellow-Christians in the first place,” said Miss Lee. “ That can do you no harm ; and as for Sorley's platitudes, they are good ones. Old as the hills, true as the Gospel from which they are taken.”

“ I know more than that old fool does.”

“ Possibly. The greater your condemnation,” said Mrs. Thomas. “ The man is, to a certain extent, objectionable to me ; because my formulas are High Church, and his are almost Low. But compare his life to yours. How much does he take from the parish ? ”

“ Well, I have the great tithe. It came to me with Silcotes, you know, and it has been paid for.”

“ Not by you,” said Mrs. Thomas. “ What does the Vicar take from the parish ? ”

“ 96*l.* 4*s.* 8*d.* last year,” said Silcotes.

“ And what did he pay his curate ? ” demanded Miss Lee.

“ I don't know and don't care,” said Silcote. “ The curate drives about in a dog-cart ; and has got one of the Joneses for his groom. He is all right.”

“ And what do you take for the great tithe, Silcote ? ” said Mrs. Thomas ; “ and what do you give to the charities, Silcote ? ”

“ Oh, hang it all, I'll go to church, if you will only leave me alone. I'll go to church, if it is only because your superstition prevents your talking there. Every one will laugh at me, and the women will giggle at one another's bonnets. But I will do anything, if you will only keep your tongues quiet.”

So Silcote went to church with them ; and they felt, at least so Mrs. Thomas said, as if they had been leading about one of Elisha's she-bears, to dance in respectable places. But they got

through with it, and the congregation was not very much scandalized, for he was the biggest landlord in these parts, and had forty thousand a year. At the Belief he sat down, instead of turning to the altar, until Mrs. Thomas poked him with her Prayer-book, upon which he demanded, in a tone perfectly audible, and particularly well "understood of the people," as the Article goes, "what the dickens he had to do now?" He got into complications with his hassock, and Miss Lee's hassock, and used what his enemies said were oaths against footstools. He had got it into his head that it was the right thing to take an umbrella to church, and he leant his (which he had borrowed from his butler) against Miss Lee's. They fell down in the middle of the Litany, and he looked as innocent as he could, but kept one eye on the congregation, and one on Miss Lee, as if to say that this was not the first time that that young woman had done it, and that you must not be hard on her.

But they got Silcote to church between them, these two women; and knew that they had done right in doing so. But neither of them were inclined to try it again. It was not a success. After lunch that day Miss Lee told Mrs. Thomas that she looked ten years older than she did in the morning. Mrs. Thomas said that she supposed she did. It would not do, this taking of Silcote to church.

"We can't rouse him, you know, cousin," said Miss Lee, after Mrs. Thomas's church experiment. "We must leave it all to God."

"I wish we could get him away from here," said Mrs. Thomas, in a subsequent conversation. "He will never get quit of his old folly with all the ministers to it still round him, with his dogs, his horses, his carriages, his bloodhounds, and all the rest of it; the man will forget his only purpose in life, and remain as foolish as ever. I myself should become a perfect fool if I remained much longer in this atmosphere of perfect useless ostentation, and I want to go to Switzerland and see after my boy. And this sort of thing is doing *you* no good, you were never made for the silly and senseless routine of a rich English country house."

"I don't think I was," said Miss Lee. "I could get on very well in London with ragged-schools, Sunday-schools, turn about at the hospital, district-visiting, daily service, and so on; but I can't stand this. This senseless, purposeless ostentation is too much for me. Possibly all my work among the London poor arose from an artificial and unhealthy state of mind, craving for excitement. I will give you in all that. But at all events one *did* do *some* good."

"You did a great deal."

"Then a great deal remains to be done. But I can't stand this. I see no chance of organizing any work here at present, and yesterday, while he was in his best mood, he told me that he intended going more into county society, and proposed going to the Reading Ball to begin with."

"That will never do for us," said Mrs. Silcote.

"It won't do for *me*. You and I are spoilt for that sort of thing. In London last year I was not introduced by any one; no one knew or cared for me; but I had my little parties in Curzon Street, and Mr. ———, caustic shrewd old man as he is, told me that they were in his opinion the pleasantest in London. The people who came were all people connected with the charities to which I subscribed. The queerest people you ever saw in your life: but so fresh, and so much in earnest. You have seen society?"

"From the still-room," said Mrs. Silcote. "But I know it. They little think how we know them and laugh at them too."

"Well, I have not seen society, and have never heard anything about it, until I came here, and returned the visits which people have paid us since Silcote has turned respectable. And I don't like it. It seems to me such ghastly folly. They talk of nothing but where they were last, and where they are going next. Lady Burton asks me if I am going to the Newley Ball, and, when I tell her, in the quietest way, that I do not go to balls in Lent, she talks across me to Lady Turton, about who is likely to be there, and so on. I don't like your society."

"*This* is not society," said Mrs. Silcote; "there is not a house within miles where you can meet a single person from the world. Believe the still-room: there are county houses and country houses. You must not talk of county society or of country houses here. There are neither the one nor the other here. This is semi-detached villa society. *Some one* told me once that at a really good country house, in a part of the country strange to him, he, arriving late, as a stranger, knew nothing of the people who were there: but, getting confidential after dinner with the man who was next him, whom he took for a brother officer, found that he was the Secretary of State for Ireland, and that two other members of the Ministry were at the table. That is what society may be in the country. What it is here you have seen."

"It won't do," said Miss Lee.

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Silcote. "My own brother is rebelling against this style of thing, and wishes he was back in the Crimea, or anywhere. And he is a very patient man. I

have plagued him hard enough to know that. As you say, it won't do."

"We must get the old man abroad," said Miss Lee.

"Yes, if we can do it. He is a very difficult man, you know."

"Well, at all events this won't do," said Miss Lee. "I have got into that state of mind that I should like to sell my travelling bag and give the money to the poor; that is rather a Colney Hatch sort of a notion, is it not? How on earth the man has gone on like this for forty years and kept out of Bedlam I can't conceive. However, I have one pilgrimage to make, and there, we *must* get him abroad. I shall not be long over it. How far is it to St. Mary's, and how does one get there?"

"Why do you want to go there?" asked Mrs. Silcote.

"To see my dear old master, Algernon Silcote: one of the finest gentlemen who ever lived. In the old times, cousin, when you were no richer than I was that man did all he could for me. He gave me all he could afford—the wages of a housemaid; but he gave me with it a delicate respect which he would not have given to the finest duchess in the land. Algernon Silcote's voice will never be heard in this world; he is a silent, long-enduring man."

"You should not have waited for him to write," said Mrs. Silcote.

"I acknowledge it," said Miss Lee. "You are right. But you brought me into this atmosphere of frivolity and neglect of duty, and so don't you see that the blame rests on your shoulders after all?"

She went at once. She was not long gone: only three days. Mrs. Silcote had spent these three days in battling with the Squire about the propriety of their going abroad. The Squire, who was in one of his unaccountable moods again, was enraged at her proposing to him the very thing he had set his heart on doing. He said that he would be somethinged if he gave way to any such feminine folly. He wanted to know if she was mad; she said she wasn't, and he said that he wasn't sure about that. She said that, as far as she had observed, he was not sure about anything. He asked did she want to insult him? She said that she would take time before she answered that. Then he asked her if she wanted to drive him mad, to which she answered that he didn't want much driving. He asked her whether Berkshire society was not good enough for her, and she said No; that she had a foolish fancy for interchanging ideas with reasonable beings. He asked what the deuce she wanted to go abroad for; she answered, to clear his brains. He asked her was not Silcotes good enough for

her, and she answered not half good enough. Then he reverted to his original proposition that he would see them all further first, and immediately afterwards began to think whether he had not better get a new portmanteau.

Silcote and his daughter-in-law, however, had their two tongues going at one another in the very way against which Miss Lee had warned them. They were sitting over the fire in the hall, with the stupid great dogs round them, when there came in the young footman who was James's friend, and they stopped their sparring.

Crimson plush breeches and white stockings, grey coat and brass buttons, with the Silcote crest on them, if you could see it. The figure of the lad disguised in this way, and on the face of the honest young lad, undisguisable by plush breeches or brass buttons, or any other antiquated ostentatious nonsense whatever, the great broad word "disaster" written in unmistakeable characters.

"Mrs. Silcote saw it at once and rose. The Squire, nursing his ill-temper, and framing repartees for his daughter-in-law which he never uttered, saw nothing of it. The footman, with disaster written on his face, only said—

"You are wanted in the housekeeper's room, ma'am."

"Was it her son?" she kept saying as she followed the footman; but she *knew* it was not. When she got to the housekeeper's room, she found only the housekeeper, her brother, and Miss Lee.

"Why have you come home secretly like this, my dear?" she said. "Something has happened: I saw it in George's face."

"Something has happened, and you must break it to Silcote. That is why I came in secretly and sent for you," said Miss Lee.

"Do you come from Algernon?"

"I do."

"Is he very ill? Is he worse?"

"Algernon is dead! Died last night. I got there too late to see him, and you must break it to—— God save us—James Sugden, go to her. She is going to faint, and she knows you best. Catch her."

James Sugden was ready to catch his sister if she had fallen, but there was no sign of falling about her. When Miss Lee told her dreadful news, Mrs. Silcote had put her two hands up to her head, and had turned round. The only effect was that she had loosened a great cascade of silver hair, and, with that falling over her shoulders, she turned round deadly pale.

"Dead! and with that wicked lie burnt into his noble heart! To die so! And we dawdling and frothing here! Dead! This is beyond measure terrible!"

CHAPTER XLII.

UNTIL ONE PERSON AT ALL EVENTS GETS NO BENEFIT FROM
THEM.

THE spring was cold, late, and wild. The north-east wind had settled down on the land, and had parched it up into a dryness more hard and more cruel than that of the longest summer-drought. The crocuses came up, but they withered; the anemones bloomed, but could not colour; the streams got low, and left the winter's mud to stagnate into zymotic diseases by the margin; the wheat got yellow; the old folks, whose time was overdue, took to dying, and the death-rate in London went up from 1,700 odd to 1,900 odd.

Death, anxious to make up his tale, in anticipation of the healthy summer which was sure to follow on this dry bitter north-easterly spring, garnered all he could. The old folks who were due to him he took as a matter of course. Threescore and ten was his watchword, and, for those who obstinately persisted in fourscore, he hung out foolish scarecrows of old friends younger than they who were dead before them; which scarecrows were in the main laughed to scorn by such of the old folks as lived in the strength of Christ and his victory.

He began to gather children with bronchitis, a sad number,—children whom, if one dare say anything on such a subject, had better have been left; then drunkards, into whose rotten lungs the north-east wind had got—men who were best dead. Then to the houses of ill-fame, where some slept and dreamt that they were picking cowslips in the old meadows, and awoke to find that they were dying utterly deserted, with only a wicked old woman to see them die. Then to the houses of the rich, driving them with their precious ones to Bournemouth or Torquay, and following them there inexorably, till the lately blooming and busy matron became only a wild wan woman, walking up and down, and bewailing her first-born, or the rose of the family. Old Death made up his tale that month, and the Registrar General acknowledged it in the *Times* duly; but he need not have gone picking about here and there to make up his number. Were not the French, the Austrians, and the Italians grinning at one another with a grin which meant a noble harvest for him? Could he not have waited two months?

And of all places to descend on, for the making up of his number, St. Mary's Hospital! "The healthiest situation," said

loud-mouthed Betts, "in all England." Why, yes. A very healthy situation, but old Death came there too. The death-rate had disappointed his expectations, one would think, for he was picking up victims wherever he could. And he picked up one life which Betts and Dora thought was worth all the others put together.

The buildings at St. Mary's had never properly dried, for Betts's work was all hurried—"Brummagem," if you will forgive slang; and the lake had got very much dried up, and reeked a little at night-time at the edges. St. Mary's-the-New was *not* built on the healthiest site in Hampshire. If Betts had consulted a man with some knowledge of physical science, he would have learnt this. On those Bagshot Sands an isolated piece of undrained clay means scarlet-fever.* Still, clay is good for foundations. Consequently this site for the new St. Mary's Hospital had been selected on an unhealthy and isolated piece of clay, which lay in the bosom of the healthful gravel a little above the lakes. We have no more to do with it than what follows: a scarlet-fever tragedy in a school or a training-ship is not any part of our story.

It was the Easter vacation. Arthur, the head-master, had gone away; and the rumours among the servants coincided in one point,—that he had had a fit, and that Mr. Algernon had "found him in it," and persuaded him to go abroad. Also the rumours coincided in the report that he had resigned his post; and furthermore, in the fact that Mrs. Morgan was not coming back any more.

The cloisters, the corridors, and the chapel were empty and silent. The ripple on the lake went always one way, westward, before the easterly wind, and the lake itself was low in the spring drought, and the bare shores exhaled an unhealthy smell.

There were no signs of spring to be seen about St. Mary's. Among heather and Scotch fir woods the seasons show scarcely any change at all, save twice in the year. The clay land, which will bear deciduous trees, shows changes almost innumerable. From the first beautiful purple bloom which comes over the woods when the elm is blossoming into catkins; through the vivid green of the oak of early May; through the majestic yet tender green of June; through the bright flush of the fresh Midsummer shoot; through the quiet peaceful green of summer; through the fantastic reds and yellows of autumn; on again to the calm greys of winter, sometimes silvered with frost and snow;—Nature in the heavier and more cultivable soils paints a never-ending succession of

* Diphtheria also and other diseases of that class; at least so I have been told by a doctor who has worked among them for twenty years.

colour studies. And with the aid of changes on the surface of the soil itself; with flowers in their succession; with the bursting green of hedges; with meadows brimful of lush green grass; with grey mown fields; with the duller green of the lattermath; with corn, with clover, with a hundred other fantastic tricks, she, with atmospheric effects, makes these studies so wonderfully numerous, that they appear as inexhaustible in their variety as games at chess; otherwise, what would become of the landscape painter?

But in these "heath countries" she only flashes into gaudy colours twice: that is to say, when the bracken springs in the hollows, and where the ling blooms on the hill. At other times she keeps to the same sombre, seasonless, Australianesque colouring; sombre masses of undeciduous fir woodland, and broad stretches of brown heath.

Algernon, looking out of the window, said to Dora,—

"Spring must be showing somewhere else, in spite of this easterly wind, but there is no spring showing here. I don't like this place."

"I hope you don't," said Dora. "I should think very little of you if you did: but I console myself with the idea that I was right in thinking, from the very first, that you never would. I hate it."

"I thought you liked it at first, my dear," said Algernon. "Why do you hate it now?"

"We are all foolish sometimes, but I hate it now. It is full of boys, and I hate boys," said she.

"But the boys are not here now."

"I know, but the whole place smells of them. And boys smell like sawdust when they are collected in sufficient numbers. And this place smells as sawdusty as ever it can smell."

"It is the smell of building, my love," said Algernon.

"It may be the building, or it may be the boys, but I know that I hate the building, and I hate the boys."

"But you liked James Sugden; now, as it turns out, James Silcote, and as it appears, your cousin."

"No, I didn't like him," said Dora, "I loved him, which is quite a different matter: and I love him still. Next to you I love him better than any one in the world. And I hate boys."

"A good lad. But you never objected to the boys in Lancaster Square?"

"There were not enough of them together, I suppose. You could know them individually, too; I liked Dempster, for instance. You can't know boys here, and, collected together, they very much brutalize one another. The house in Lancaster Square

never smelt nice, I allow. If they had been long enough in it to make the place smell of sawdust, the smell of roast mutton from the kitchen—which if you remember was permanent, and not to be put down by the smell of any other cookery—would have extinguished it. But we never ought to have left Lancaster Square.”

“And why, again, Dora?”

“Because we have lost everything. Mr. Betts was tolerable while you were his patron; now he is yours his vulgar old nature is reasserting itself, and he is getting intolerable again. He *was* grateful to you, and I daresay thinks that he is now. But he patronizes you openly. And when I see him doing that I long to slap his face.”

“My dear Dora! You are unladylike, my child.”

“I daresay. Yet I was trained in my manners by one of the first ladies in the land. By Miss Lee, for instance, with her carriage and pair, and her grooms and footmen, and her house in Curzon Street, and her falallallies generally. You naturally urge that Miss Lee, at the time she was condescending enough to undertake my education, was getting herself taught chants by Uncle Arthur in the square, in the dark, not to mention talking with the policeman in the gutter; and had not as yet set up in the business of fine lady. I allow that you are right. She certainly had *not*. But there is no appeal from her now.”

“You must curb that shrewd little tongue of yours, my darling, my only friend, my best beloved.”

“Let it run one moment more, father, only one moment. It never told a lie, and it shall be dead, as far as its shrewdness is concerned, towards you at least, for ever. There is another reason why you ought never to have come here.”

“And that?”

Out of her prompt little soul came her prompt little answer; though that answer was never given in words. In one moment she had remembered his debts and his failing health, and had determined not to say what was on her tongue. What was on her tongue was in effect this. That, having committed himself to extreme High Church formulas, he had lost prestige by retreating from an outpost like Camden Town, and coming into a scholastic society like St. Mary's, half, or more than half, mediæval in its ways, where he could do as he liked without criticism. She, with her shrewd sharp little Protestant intellect, utterly disagreed with his convictions about ecclesiastical matters (to make short work of it); but she, like a regular little woman, disliked her father having deserted the post of honour, though she thought he was

fighting on the wrong side. She thought all this, but she promptly determined to say nothing about it, and held her tongue, as far as he was concerned.

She only said, "I suppose I am foolish in taking you out for a walk, for your throat is very queer, and you have been talking too much."

"I think you have done the main of the talking," said Algernon.

"Never mind that. And don't get into that wretched habit of arguing, and being sharp, and twisting words to mean what they never were intended to mean. Creation is divided into two great classes,—Silcotes, bantams, and donkeys for one; the rest of the creation for the other. Now I will take you out for a walk, my best of all men, and we will get out of this brown desert, and into cultivated land, and we will see spring together, in spite of the east wind."

"Silcotes, bantams, and donkeys are the first division of the animal creation, are they?" said Algernon to Dora, while he was wrapping himself up. "You belong to the first division."

"In every respect?" said Dora.

"In every respect," said Algernon.

"Come away, and we will find some primroses," said Dora. And so they went away towards the distant fields and hedgerows, across the brown undrained moorland.

I can give a harrowing death-bed scene! I have seen too many to venture to describe one. Poor old Algernon came back to St. Mary's choking with bronchitis, aggravated by the new cold he had caught hunting primroses in the distant hedgerows with Dora, and died. The last articulate words he spoke through his choking throat were these: "I must write a letter before I die."

And Dora, with grief and consternation in her heart, but with all her brave nerve about her, was able for the occasion. She put the writing materials on the bed, and, although he could not speak, his mind was clear and his hand steady, until he choked and died of suffocation, leaving the letter for her to read.

It went thus—

"MY FATHER,—I used harsh and cruel words to you once on this miserable matter of my mother's honour. I humbly ask your forgiveness. Believing as you did the wicked lie, you could hardly have acted otherwise. But give the rest of your life to clearing the matter up.

"ALGERNON."

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE CONFERENCE ON THE RAMPARTS IS INTERRUPTED BY AN OLD FRIEND.

WITH the cool breeze blowing from Aspern on her face, the Princess turned towards Kriegsthum. She felt that in some way her silly scheming—if it might be called scheming—so obstinately carried out, was unsuccessful; and that Kriegsthum, the well-paid minister of her follies, the agent in all her silly schemes, was face to face with her.

She had come to Vienna, believing that Kriegsthum was so deeply committed to the revolutionary party, to Frangipanni the Italian Constitutionalist on the one hand, and to Boginsky the outrageous Mazzinist on the other, that he dare not follow her into the lion's paws. She was quite deceived. His was a knight move against a castle; to go to whist, she had played the last trump out, and he had come in with an overpowering suit. Kriegsthum was not inclined to let such an exceedingly well-yielding head of cattle stray out of his pasture; and so, on the strength of his being known to the Austrian police as the most clever, unscrupulous, and best-informed spy in Europe, he had made his peace with the Austrian Government, and followed his dear Princess to Vienna, with a view of "working" the Princess and receiving pay from the Austrian police at one and the same time. So much about him for the present.

"Madame has not served me well," he began, when the Princess turned to him. "I only say so much at present. The time may come, if Madame continues her present course of action, when I may say that Madame has served me shamefully and shabbily."

The poor Princess, softened perhaps by the wind from Aspern, began to cry; and to wish, strangely enough, but with a true instinct, that her very objectionable nephew, Arthur, was there, or even old Miss Raylock, to confront this rascal. But she was all alone, and wept. So Kriegsthum went on.

"The time may come when I may have to say to Madame that it is hopeless for her to attempt to escape me. That I hold Madame in the hollow of my hand. That I love her she need not be told, but ingratitude of the most traitorous kind may extinguish love. I may have to say all this at some future time; at present I do not. Madame has proposed this secluded meeting herself, knowing that she could not propose a public one; but she will see that I am all-powerful, and that I must be treated with confidence."

The Princess had not yet got through her softened mood, and was still crying. The fool got contemptuous of her, the most Silcote of the Silcotes—"the incarnation of Silcotism," as Miss Raylock once said, who ought to know; and in his contempt for her he leaped too quickly to his first object, and began his business exactly at the wrong end.

"I want money, Madame. I am poor."

She wiped her eyes directly. "You always do want money," she said. "I wonder what you do with it all. But I have not got any."

"Madame has sixty thousand pounds' worth of jewellery. I must have some of that."

Had he not himself told Tom Silcote that very night that she would see *him*, Tom, deeply as she loved him, in the workhouse, (or to that effect), before she would part with a single stone? Yet this fool and conspirator (are they not now and then convertible terms?) proposed for himself what he would never have proposed for her darling Tom.

An Italian, one would have thought, would never have made such a blunder, and would never have made such a venture. But of what nation was Kriegsthurm again? It was a foolish venture, and the tables were at once turned for a time.

Kriegsthurm proposed to her to touch her sacred accumulations. The attorney blood which was in her from her father's side, and the old English land accumulative blood which was in her from her mother's side, alike rose in rebellion to this demand, flushed her cheek, and, strange to say, passed back to her brain, and set her wits a-going.

And she had been to Italy and seen the theatricalities, and could imitate them on occasions; as Master Kriegsthurm will bear witness to his dying day. She gave him one instance of this now, and he never asked for another.

They were standing together under a lonely gas-lamp, which was burning steadily within its glass, in spite of the wandering wind which came from Aspern, and they could see one another's faces.

He was confident, bold, and coarse (to refresh your memory after so long, he was a square, coarse-featured man, with a red complexion). Hers was pale, thin, and refined, with the remains of a very great beauty. They stood and looked at one another; he, at least, looked at her until he saw that she was not looking at him, but over his shoulder, at which time he began to feel an uneasy sensation in his back. Still he looked at her steadily.

And her face changed as he watched it. The eyes grew more

prominent, the lips parted; she was gazing at something which he dared not turn and face: gazing over his right shoulder, too, most unpleasantly. No one would care to have, say for instance Lady Macbeth, looking steadily over your right shoulder, while you were perfectly conscious that Malcolm's mishap was not your first offence. The Princess of Castelnuovo stared so very steadily over Kriegsthum's right shoulder that she had frightened him out of his wits before she tried her *grand coup*.

All of a sudden she broke out, sharp, shrill, and clear.

"Mind that man! He is going to stab you from behind, and penetrate your lungs. Mind him!"

Kriegsthum, with a loud oath, dashed alongside of her, and began his before-mentioned polyglot system of swearing. We have nothing to do with that, but something with this.

The Princess knew quite well that his life was not perfectly safe here in Vienna, and she had tried to frighten him by pretending to see a democrat, thirsting for his blood, behind him in the dark. She had intended to frighten him, but she frightened herself also a little bit. She never believed that there was a betrayed democrat behind him; she only wanted to scare him. She had only evolved that democrat who was to penetrate Kriegsthum's lungs out of her internal consciousness. Yet, when Kriegsthum had run round behind her for protection, they both heard that heretofore purely imaginary democrat running away along the ramparts as hard as ever his legs would carry him.

The Princess, though quite as heartily frightened as if she by idly and incredulously saying an old spell had raised the devil, was the first to recover her presence of mind. Kriegsthum, though a bold man, was as white as a sheet when he again faced her under the gas-lamp, with his eyes squinting over his shoulder. She began—

"Ungrateful man! I have saved your life!"

"I acknowledge it, Madame. Did you see the man?"

"I saw him plainly."

Oh, Princess! Princess!

"Was he like any one you had ever seen before?" asked Kriegsthum.

"No," said she, "a tall dark man with a beard." This was rather a worse fib than the first one, though she did not know it. The man had no beard, and she *had* seen him before.

"Let us have no recriminations, Madame; I will not even ask you why you distrusted me and fled from me. For,"

he added, as his nerve came back, "the spirits have told me that."

She was fond of the man, and had got the whip hand of him through an accident. Her fondness for the man caused her to spare the use of the whip. The revelations of the spirits had been so exceedingly unsatisfactory that even her silly credulity had given way under them, and spiritualism was now among the follies of the past. She was friendly with him.

"Never mind the spirits ; and I will tell you why I run away from you. You knew everything about Sir Godfrey Mallory ; and you knew, and know, that I was innocent. My brother was a man so fierce and so strict that I feared his anger, particularly after Miss Raylock had got the power of putting *her* tongue to work about it. I consulted you, and you promised to save my reputation. You then came to me, and told me that you had done so by making Silcote believe that Sir Godfrey's attentions were paid to my sister-in-law, his wife. You remember my despair and horror at such a course, but you pointed out to me that she was too far above suspicion for any breath to tarnish her character ; and indeed I believed you. But, to my infinite wonder and consternation, the poison took hold on my jealous brother's heart, in spite of my open familiarity with poor Godfrey Mallory, whom I liked in a way—you know what a fool I am, at least your pocket does. I dared neither speak nor hold my tongue. Her death lies at the door of my cowardly folly and your villany. And she will be a ministering angel when you and I lie howling."

One is allowed to quote Shakespeare, so I put Shakespeare's words in her mouth. Her own were fiercer and coarser, for Silcote's sister could be fierce and coarse at times.

"Till very lately, Kriegsthurm, I thought that this was all you had done. The other day when you were dunning me beyond patience for money, and I threatened to appeal to my brother, you told the old horrible story, that you had got my handwriting forged by some woman's hand, accusing that saint of wishing to poison her husband, and had put poison in a place where he could find it. Then, for the first time, I realized that you and I had murdered my sainted sister-in-law's body, and my brother's soul ; and I fled here, where I believed you dared not follow me."

"Madame paid me highly," said Kriegsthurm, "and also treated me kindly. My object was to carry out Madame's wishes most fully. And I did so."

There was a certain terrible truth in the man's defence of himself. There was a large liberal grandeur about his rascality

which made him, without all question, the greatest rascal in Europe. The general rule, I believe, in employing a rascal is to promise him his pay as soon as the villany is completed. Such a procedure was utterly unnecessary in the case of Kriegsturm. Pay Kriegsturm well first, and then all you had to look out for was that he did not, in his enthusiastic devotion to rascality, out-run his instructions, and compromise *you*. What his real name was, or where he came from, is a thing we shall never know. His name certainly could not have been Kriegsturm; even in the case of such an arch scoundrel as he was, it is impossible to believe that he would keep his own name. That would have been a stroke of genius with which we cannot credit even him. Dalmatian crossed with Greek might produce him, did not his German, almost Dutch, *physique* render such a theory entirely impossible.

Yet such entirely noble people as Frangipanni and Boginsky believed in the man; believed, at the very least, that, if he was faithless in most things, he was faithful to them. Conspirators, often at the same time the most honest and the most credulous of men, are not difficult men to deceive. About this man there was a broad radical magnificence of scoundrelism which might have taken in some statesmen, leave alone conspirators.

"We will not dispute further, your Highness," he said, now giving her the title she loved; "I served your interests, and I was paid. I will begin all over again. I want money."

"And I have none," said the Princess, now perfectly confident. "This is a good beginning."

"But your Highness may get money again. What is your object in wanting money?"

"You know. I want it for Tom."

"Use your influence with your brother, and reinstate him as heir of Silcotes. I tell you, and I *know*, that there is no one whom the Squire loves as he does the Colonel. The Colonel is steady enough now, and has had his lesson. The Squire is quite sick of Arthur, and besides, Arthur has fits, and bullies the old gentleman. I tell your Highness that, if you and I put our wits to work, we can get the Colonel out of this, and safe back to Silcote before the French have crossed the Ticino."

"Are they going to fight, then?" said the Princess eagerly.

"Are they *not*?" said Kriegsturm emphatically. "Do you think I don't know? Did I ever leave England before?"

"I cannot have Tom," said the Princess, "in a campaign, he is so rash and audacious. Can you save Tom for me? I cannot do without Tom now; I would part with my opals to save Tom. Kriegsturm, can you save Tom for me?"

"No harm will come to him, your Highness, believe me. He *must* go to the campaign; not only because his character is ruined if he does not, not only because he cannot avoid it if he would, but because one half of my plan consists in his winning back his father's favour by distinguishing himself in it."

"Give me your plan, then."

"I will," said Kriegsthurm. "Now you must allow that the Colonel has a very good notion of his own interests. You can't deny that, your Highness; at least, if you did, your pocket would turn inside out in contradiction."

"I allow it," said the Princess; "Tom *is* fond of pleasure; and natural, too, at his time of life."

Tom was over thirty, but she always looked on him as a boy.

"I do not exactly allude to his fondness for pleasure, your Highness," said Kriegsthurm, "I only allude to his perfect readiness to lead an easy life on other people's money. I call attention, *en passant* only, to this amiable little trait in his character, to show that we shall have no difficulty whatever with *him*; that, if he saw any chance of being reinstated at Silcotes, he would give up his career in the Austrian army, his character for personal courage, his chance of salvation, yourself, or the mother that bore him, to attain it."

"Tom certainly has all the persistence of the family in the pursuit of an object," was the way the Princess complacently put it.

"He has. I asked if he would stick at murder, and he rode the high horse, and talked about kicking me downstairs; but he wouldn't; no more would"—he was going to say, "you," but he said, "a great many other people."

"Now, instead of trying to bring Tom's nature to your own level, my dear Kriegsthurm," replied the Princess, "you should try to raise your nature to his;" which was pretty as it stood, but which, on the face of it, did not seem to mean quite enough to arrest Kriegsthurm's line of argument.

"Now," he therefore regardlessly went on, "we three being pretty comfortable together, and I having to find brains for the pair of you, it comes to this. The Squire is very fond of you, and very fond of the Colonel. You haven't hit it off together exactly, you remark. Why, no; but nothing is commoner than for people who are very fond of one another *not* to hit it off. You and the Colonel don't always hit it off, you know; why, if he were to offer to touch your jewels, the dead soldiers at Aspern down there would hear the row you two would make together. I and my poor wife didn't hit it off together. She put

a knife into me once, but I didn't think much about that. When I married a Sicilian I knew that I might have to attend vespers. But we were very fond of one another, and you and the Colonel are fond of one another, and you and the Squire are fond of one another, in spite of all said and done. And the Colonel must cheer the Squire's old English heart by killing a few Frenchmen ; and you must use your influence with the Squire, and get the Colonel reinstated."

"That won't do," said the Princess, decisively.

"And why, your Highness ? " asked Kriegsthum.

"Because, the next time my brother sees me, he will probably assassinate me publicly, and, if not, hand me over to justice for robbing him. Now don't look *farouche* like that, and, if you choose to swear, swear in something less than a dozen languages at once."

"I was not swearing, your Highness ; I was praying—praying for the safety of your Highness's intellect."

"Well, then, if praying produces that effect on your face, I should advise you to stop it until you have consulted a priest of your faith, whatever that may be."

"I will do so, Madame. Will Madame explain ? " said Kriegsthum, coming down sulkily to the inferior title.

"Certainly. You forged a letter to my brother in my handwriting about this poison business. We need not go into that ; we have had more than enough of it ; and the mischief arising from it is only beginning, as it seems to me. My brother kept that letter in a despatch-box in his bedroom. I, living with him so long, and knowing his habits, knew that he had *something* there, but did not know what. When, only the other day, you made the shameless confession of your unutterable villany to me, I acted on the spur of the moment. I stole his keys, I opened the black box, I stole all the papers in it, and immediately afterwards met him in the gallery."

"Did he suspect ? "

"No ; but he must have found out now. I took all kinds of papers, mortgages to the amount of many thousands of pounds, as it seems to me ; and two of his wills."

"Your Highness has committed a serious felony," said Kriegsthum.

"So I supposed at the time," said the Princess. "But it is not of much consequence, I think. I talked about his assassinating me, or handing me over to justice just now. I spoke too fast, as usual. He will never prosecute, you know. But our meeting again is an impossibility, that is all."

"I might prosecute," said Kriegsthum, "if your Highness returned to England."

"The idea of your prosecuting any one, my dear Kriegsthum ! I don't know anything about law, but I know perfectly well that you are by far too disreputable a person to be believed on your oath. Off your oath you can be trusted, as I have often shown you ; but once sworn I would not trust you, and you know that no English jury would."

"I have been faithful to Madame."

"Yes, but never on your oath. I have heard you swear certainly, in many languages, but you never took an oath to me. Pray, *par exemple*, to how many democratic societies have you sworn oaths, and how many of those oaths remain unbroken ?"

"Your Highness is too strong for me. I wish to talk business. I cannot stand your Highness's logic."

"I am a foolish person," replied the Princess, "but like most foolish people, I am very cunning. You have ten times my brains, and ten times my *physique* ; yet you tremble at every shiver of the breeze in the poplars above you. You would answer that I am a conspirator also ; yet who is the bravest of us now ? I am not so much afraid of a violent death as you are. Women are braver than men. Come, to business."

"I think I am as brave as most men, Madame," said Kriegsthum, "and I was not, until this moment, aware that your Highness was in expectation of a sudden and violent death, as I have been for now twenty years. If your Highness doubts my nerve, would you be so condescending as to allow me to prove it ?"

"Certainly," said the Princess.

Kriegsthum was standing with his head bent down into his bosom, as if shamefaced at losing the scolding-match with her. He now said, without altering his attitude, "Your Highness speaks Italian as well as English. Will you allow me to converse with you in Italian ?"

Again she said, "Certainly."

Kriegsthum, with his chin on his chest, went on in that language. "The Signora has challenged my nerves. I now challenge hers. The dearest friend of the man whom her late husband wronged so shamefully is standing close behind her ; if you turn you are lost. I am going to seize him, and I shall have to spring past you. He does not understand Italian. I demand therefore of the Signora that she shall remain perfectly tranquil in the little imbroglio which approaches. All I ask of your Highness is, that you will walk away from the combatants."

The Princess with her English nerves, stood as still as a lighthouse ; Kriegsthum, with his great powerful head bent down into the hollow of his enormous chest, as if to make his *congé*. But in one moment he had dashed past her, and had seized in his enormous muscular, coarse-bred, inexpressive fingers, the cravat and collar of our old friend Boginsky.

CHAPTER XLIV.

“ JAMES’S ” PROSPECTS ARE DISCUSSED.

KRIEGSTHURM was some fifteen stone, and Boginsky some eleven. The natural consequence of which was, that Boginsky came hurling on his back on the gravel, with old Kriegsthum a-top of him. The Princess heard the hurly-burly, but like a true woman, waited to see what would be made out of it. She did not hear the conversation which followed between the two men, when they had got on their legs again, which was carried on in German.

“ Why, what *art* thou doing here, and now, of all places and times ? ” demanded Kriegsthum, as soon as he had picked himself up from the top of the laughing Boginsky, and was standing face to face with him.

“ I was listening to what you and the Princess were saying,” replied Boginsky, merrily. “ The devil, but you are strong. You will face a man boldly enough when he faces you ; but you were frightened when I came *behind* you just now.”

“ I am afraid of your democratic committees,” said Kriegsthum.

“ You have reason to be so,” said Boginsky.

“ Meet me again in half an hour,” said Kriegsthum, naming the place. And so they hurriedly parted.

“ No danger after all, your Highness. Only an old brother conspirator, who may be useful to us. Now let us resume our conversation. What were the contents of these wills which you took ? ”

“ I cannot say. Do you think that I would demean myself so far as to abuse my brother’s confidence ? I burnt them, and a nice smell they made. My maid thought that I had scorched

my boots against the stove and I showed her a burnt glove to account for it."

At this characteristic piece of hopeless wandering folly on her part, Kriegsthurm was very nearly throwing up the whole business in despair. Not in disgust, for he in his way loved the woman. He went on, without any sign of contempt.

"That is rather a pity. One would have liked to know. I suppose he kept two wills by him to see how different people behaved themselves, so that he might destroy either. The one, if Madame will follow me, was probably made in favour of your favourite Thomas, the heir of his choice." And he paused to let her speak.

"And the other in favour of Arthur," she said.

"Excuse me. Silcote proposed to make him his heir, but Arthur refused, and they had words over it. No. The second will was probably in favour of James Sugden, a young man towards whom the Squire has shown the most singular favour: a favour so singular for him that there is little doubt that he is—forgive me—the darling son of your brother's old age."

"*That* cub!" exclaimed the Princess.

"I am glad that you consider him a cub," said Kriegsthurm. "I have never seen him, and have doubtless been misinformed about him. He has been represented to me as a youth of singular personal beauty, of amazingly artistic talent, and irresistibly engaging manners."

"He kept all these qualities carefully to himself whenever I saw him," said the Princess. "Yet still he was handsome, now I think of it, and drew beautifully, and everybody was very fond of him."

"Exactly," said Kriegsthurm, admiring the admirable way in which she contradicted herself, talking "smartly" one moment, and then letting her honesty, or simplicity, or whatever it was, get the better of her. "And this beautiful youth, born close to the lodge-gates, is desperately in love with your niece Anne, the Squire's favourite grandchild. It seems evident that one of the Squire's two plans is to foster a marriage between these two, and leave them the estate."

"If your theory of his birth be true," said the Princess, laughing, "it seems hardly probable that my brother, with his extremely rigid notions, should encourage a match between Anne and her uncle!"

Kriegsthurm had never thought of that. He had merely an idea that they were in some sort her cousins. I suppose that all conspiracies go blundering and tumbling about in this way before

the time of projection. Judging from their almost universal failure, one would certainly say so.

"Besides, I remember all about this boy. He was not born near the park-gates at all. His father and mother were two Devonshire peasants, who migrated up into our part of the world when the child was quite big. And moreover my brother's morality is utterly beyond suspicion,—has not his inexorable Puritanism been the cause of half this misery?—but to whom do I talk? I remember all about the boy and his belongings now. His mother was a woman of singular and remarkable beauty: with a rude ladylike nobility in her manner, which I never saw anywhere else. That very impertinent old woman Miss Raylock (who by the bye was creeping and bothering about at the ball to-night), pointed her out to me first, one time when I was talking about the superiority of the Italian peasant over the English. And I remember all about the boy too. Tom and the people went out after some poachers from Newley, and this boy showed the most splendid courage, and got fearfully beaten and bruised, almost killed. And Tom,—was it not like my dear Tom?—carried the boy to Silcotes in his arms, as tenderly as if he was his own son. He little knew that the ungrateful boy would ever come to stand between him and his inheritance."

As little, kind Princess, as he knew that the poor wounded boy he carried in his arms so tenderly was his own son. Once in his wild loose wicked life, God gave him the chance of doing his duty by his own child he had so cruelly neglected and ignored: ignored so utterly that he would not inform himself about its existence. Through his own unutterable selfishness, once, and once only, had he the chance of doing his duty by his own son: on that occasion he did it tenderly and well. Let us remember this in his favour, since we have but little else to remember. The man was not at all bad.

"Your Highness's reminiscences are interesting," said Kriegsthum. "This youth, this James Sugden, stands between the Colonel and his inheritance, and must be removed."

"What do you propose to do, then?"

"Wait, your Highness. I give up my theory of his birth, of course. I see that it is indefensible: so the original difficulty remains, don't you see? What is more likely than that Silcote should have planned a match between these two?"

"Nothing, I suppose."

"Of course, nothing. We all know that they are his two favourites, and moreover they have fallen in love with one another."

"Excuse me once more," said the Princess. "This boy is not in love with Anne. He has the most extreme personal objection to her, to all her ways, and all her works. It is that mealy-faced, wretched little Reginald who is her adorer. This James worships Dora, Algernon's daughter."

"As if it mattered with a boy of nineteen. If his patron gave the word he would fall in love with this beautiful little niece of yours to-morrow."

"I don't know that," said the Princess. "He is terribly resolute, quiet as he looks. And she is a vixen."

"Your Highness is so absorbed in sentimental trivialities between boys and girls, that we shall never get on."

"They count, you know. And Dora, the Squire's other favourite, is desperately fond of *him*."

"I beg pardon."

"I said that she was deeply, jealously in love with this cub."

"That might be made to work," said Kriegsthum. "Do you see how?"

"No," said the Princess.

"No more do I just at present," said Kriegsthum, thoughtfully. "Have you any remark to make, Madame?"

"I have to remark that you and I have got into a very idiotic muddle at present. I generally remark that an idiotic muddle is the upshot of all conspiracies. I have not been engaged in so many as you have, but I have been engaged in enough, and to spare: I can speak of the effect of them on my own mind, and that effect has been muddle, unutterable muddle: a muddle which I fear has got chronic with me. For instance, I don't at this moment know whether you want James Sugden to marry Anne, or Anne to marry Reginald, or what you want. If I could marry my brother Harry it would set everything right at once, because I could leave the property to Tom after his death; but then I can't marry Harry, and besides, after this despatch-box business he will never speak to me again. There is only one thing more that I have to say, which is this: that I most positively refuse to marry anybody whatever, even if it were to save the Silcote property from the hammer. I had quite enough of *that* with my sainted Massimo."

"But, your Highness——"

"He and his Signora Frangipanni indeed. Yes. Oh, quite so. The little doll. Frangipanni was a *gentleman*: and he believes to this day that I instigated Massimo both to the political villany and to the other worse villany. It is you, Kriegsthum, who have torn my character to tatters, and compromised my name

with your plots, until I am left all alone, a miserable and silly old woman ! ”

“ Is she *off* ? ” thought Kriegsthurm, for she had raised her tone so high in uttering the last paragraph that the nearest sentry challenged. She was not “ off.” She began crying, and modulated her tone.

“ Madame is safer here than elsewhere,” said Kriegsthurm again. “ She will remember the fearfully traitorous conduct of her late husband to the Italian cause in 1849. She will remember that she has rendered it impossible for her to go to England in the face of her brother’s vengeance, and impossible to go to Italy in the face of the vengeance of the Italian party and Signor Frangipanni. She will then remain here ? ”

“ I think you had better leave me,” she said. “ I am getting nervous. There, go. I will have no harm done to the boy, but do the best you can for Tom. Are you angry with me ? You know that I have always loved you, and been a faithful friend to you. Don’t be angry with me.”

Kriegsthurm was a great scoundrel, but then he was a most good-natured man. Many who knew a very great deal about him said he was a good *hearted* man. Probably his heart had very little to do with his actions. Most likely, lying inside that enormous chest, it was a very *healthy* heart, with the blood clicking steadily through it as true as a time-piece. In spite of his villainies and plots and scoundrelisms, he had some suspicion of what is called a “ good heart.” If one had said that some part of the man’s brain was benevolent, and was expressed on his ferociously jolly great face, one might be nearer the truth. Anyhow, there was benevolence and gratitude in the man somewhere, for he knelt down before the foolish old Princess, took her hand in his, kissed it, bowed to her, and sped away towards his interview with Boginsky, leaving her drying her tears and looking towards the French and Austrian graves over at Aspern.

CHAPTER XLV.

NOT TOO MUCH TO HIS ADVANTAGE.

“ THAT is a very noble woman,” said Kriegsthurm, as he halt walked, half trotted along. “ She is worth the whole lot of ’em put together. She is a fool, like the rest of her family, but she

is to my mind the best of them. She complains that she has got puzzled about the family plot: supposing I were to complicate it further by marrying *her*? No, that wouldn't do. In the first place she wouldn't have me, and in the second place we should all be in Bedlam as soon as the old man died, trying to find out our different relationships. She has managed to turn my brains upside down; they must be getting older than they were, or she would never have addled them like this. If I can get a thousand a year from Colonel Silcote, this is my last plot; for my wits are failing me. I have debauched my logical powers and my power of examining evidence by going in for that wretched spiritualist business, the only piece of real charlatanism I ever did in my life. It has not paid, and I may say myself, as a very long-headed rascal, that charlatanism never does pay in the long run. The money comes too easy and too quick to stay by you. You put other folks off their heads, but then you put yourself off too. You cannot succeed unless you put yourself off your head and make yourself believe in it. And so you get to think that the fools are not fools, and, even if they are, that the crop will last for ever. And so you debauch your soul about money matters, and spend when you ought to be saving.

"It is the same with conspiracies," he was going on, when he came sharp round the corner on to the place of meeting with Boginsky, and there was Boginsky waiting for him: who, when he saw him, burst out laughing.

"What in the name of goodness," said Kriegsturm, laughing in his turn, "brings you into this wasp's nest?"

"Revolutionary business, my dear," said Boginsky. "We, in London, thought that, as all the troops were being poured south, there might be a chance for us. We thought that a democratic rising in Vienna, in the rear of the army, just when they were hammer-and-tongs at it with the French, would produce a most unforeseen complication; and we live by complication and confusion, as you know."

"Now for a thorough-going fool give me a thorough-going democrat," said Kriegsturm, impatiently. "Do you think that if you had any chance, *I* should not have known of it? Do you see on which side *I* am? Austria will be beaten certainly, but in spite of that, I have declared against the circles."

"I gave up all hopes the moment I saw it," said Boginsky.

"And how is your precious scheme working?"

"Well, you know better than I can tell you," said Boginsky. "It will not work at all. The committees won't look at us. They say that the demolition of the fortifications has changed

the chances utterly. I came here expecting to head a revolt, and all the employment I can find is a very dirty job."

"And what may that be?" said Kriegsthurm.

"To watch you, and if I catch you alone and unarmed—as you are now; in a private place—like this; in the dead of night with no witnesses—as now; to assassinate you. Which I am of course going to do this very instant, with this very American revolver. Therefore go down on your knees, and say your prayers at once."

Kriegsthurm laughed pleasantly. "You have got among bad company, then."

"I have. The old breed of democrats is dying out, and are replaced by men who disgrace the name, like these fellows. These fellows are Orsinists to a man. And what is worse, they have forgotten, or learnt to vilipend, the great names of the movement, Garibaldi, Kossuth, Mazzini, Manin, ay, and Boginsky, are sneered at by them as half-hearted men. These men, who sit, and plot, and drink, laugh at us who rose for the cause, and were taken red-handed. They proposed this business to me as a proof of my sincerity. I need not say that I accepted their offer with avidity, lest some more unscrupulous democrat among them might take it in hand. You are in great danger here."

"I thank you, Boginsky. You are a gentleman. You yourself are in very great danger here. I think, from an answer he gave me to-night, that Tom Silcote has seen you, and if he saw you again might denounce you to-morrow. I must get you out of this place."

"You must indeed, and yourself also."

"We will let that be; for the present, you are the first person to be considered. Are you poor?"

"I have absolutely nothing. I have nothing to eat. I have no clothes but what I stand in. Was there ever a democrat of my sort who was rich? And I have no passport. As for passing the lines into Italy, that is entirely impossible. I could get northward, but I have no money."

"You shall have money and passport if you will do something for me."

"Your money is Austrian, and I will not touch it."

"You can pay it back."

"Well, Jesuit! What is it then?"

"There is a young English artist, one Sugden, now at Saltzburgh."

"Well! Do you wish me to murder him for you?"

"I wish to heaven you would. It is so terribly unlucky you're being a gentleman and a man of honour."

"Not unlucky for *you*, is it?" said Boginsky.

"I am not sure of that," said Kriegsthum. "I am getting so sick of the whole business, and more particularly of the Silcote complication, that I almost wish you had followed the instructions of the democratic committee, and put a bullet into me. I don't ask you to murder him. Will you meet him, and involve him in some of your confounded democratic conspiracies?"

"Teach him the beauty of democracy?" said Boginsky.

"Exactly," said Kriegsthum. "Let him be seen in your sweet company before you make your own escape. Introduce him to the lower democratic circles, such as those of Vienna, who employed you to assassinate me. Excite his brain about the matter (he is as big a fool as you, I am given to understand). Show him the whole beauty of extreme democracy on Austrian soil; do you understand?"

"I see," said Boginsky. "Compromise him thoroughly?"

"*Ex-actly*, once more," said Kriegsthum. "He can't come to any harm, you know. He is an English subject. They would send the British fleet into the Platten See sooner than allow one of his pretty curls to be disarranged. Will you teach this noble young heart the beauties of Continental democracy?"

"Certainly," said Boginsky. "Where shall I meet you to get the money and the passport?"

Kriegsthum made the appointment, and the night swallowed up Boginsky.

Kriegsthum's brains had been so very much upset by his interview with the Princess, that he felt little inclined to go home to bed without having arrived at some conclusion or another. "These Silcotes," he said to himself, "would addle the brains of a Cavour, and I am not the man I was. That Boginsky will do nothing, you know. I must have this cub of a boy out of the way somehow; hang him! I wish he was dead. If the young brute were only dead, one could see one's way," he added aloud.

A sentinel, to whom he was quite close in his reverie, challenged.

"Silcote," cried Kriegsthum savagely.

"What says he?" said the sentinel. "Stand?"

"Novara! Novara! dummer kopf," replied Kriegsthum, testily. "Is he deaf?"

"Buffalora," said the sentry, sulkily, bringing his musket sharply to his shoulder, and covering something behind Kriegsthum, and dangerously in line with him. "You behind there, who are following the Herr, and have heard the passwords, come forward, or I will fire."

"May the, &c., confound this most immoral city," said Kriegsthurm. "If I was only once well out of it! Now, who in the name of confusion will this turn out to be? Knock him over, sentry, if he don't advance. I am Kriegsthurm of the police."

"He is coming," said the sentry, with his finger still on the trigger, covering the advancing man. "Ah! here he is. You are now responsible for him, sir."

There crept into the light of the lamp which hung above the sentry's box a very handsome beardless youth, of possibly twenty. The face of him was *oval*, the chin end of the oval being very long and narrow, the mouth well-shaped but large, and wreathed up at the corners into a continual smile, the splendid eyes not showing so much as they might have done from under the lowered eyebrows, nose long, complexion brown, hair black and curling, gait graceful but obsequious. A young gentleman from the Papal States, of the radical persuasion, rather shabbily dressed.

Kriegsthurm was round and loud with him in Italian, and ended by arresting him formally before the sentry, and marching him off into the darkness.

CHAPTER XLVI.

—WHILE HE HIMSELF DRAWS TOWARDS THE GREAT RENDEZVOUS.

THE new world, the world of nature, in her larger, coarser, Continental form, first broke on our old friend James's mind at the Drachenfels, that first outwork of the great European mountains. The great steel-grey river, sweeping round the crags and the vineyards, and winding away into the folded hills, gave him noble promise of the more glorious land which lay behind. It is as common as Brighton now, but remember what it was to you when you were as young and as fresh as James.

It satisfied his genial, "jolly," young soul. "Let us," he said to the quiet, apathetic Reginald, "make a lingering meal of all this. Let us dawdle up this beautiful river to the Alps, and study every inch of it, until we have traced it to its cradle. Then we will descend on Italy, and take it."

Reginald cared little, so long as he was in James's company; and so they dawdled up the river bank, from right to left, sketching, painting, bathing, learning their German, and singing. They got

enamoured of the German student life, and essayed to imitate it, with more or less success. They were both, like all St. Mary's boys, pretty well trained as singers, and James had a singularly fine voice. From their quaint training they had both got to be as free from any kind of conventionality as any German could possibly wish; and in a very short time they grew quite as demonstrative of their emotions as any German of them all. They were a great success among those Rhine people. The handsome, genial, vivacious James, with his really admirable, though uneducated, painting, his capital and correct drawing, his splendid singing, his unfailing good humour, his intense kindliness of disposition, was of course a success: in spite of his, as yet, bad German. He was, and is, a really fine fellow, who would succeed anywhere, from California to Constantinople. But the quieter Reginald was a greater. He painted infinitely worse, he sang worse, he talked less, than James; but the Rhine people believed in him more. When James had dazzled, and possibly puzzled them, they would turn to the silent Reginald, after all, and wish to know *his* opinion, believing, from his comparative silence, that he was the wiser; and Reginald, who had been hoping that James had exhausted the subject, knowing nothing of the matter in hand, would do his best, and be oracular and vague, which pleased them immensely.

So these two happy boys went up and down and to and fro in this early spring, as free as birds, as happy as birds. The snow was not off the Höhe-Acht when they first heard of the Eifel country. They must go, of course, at once, and went from Coblentz; though the ice was still floating down the Moselle, and navigation was impossible. They walked up that wonderful river side to Treves, in slush and mud; enjoying themselves immensely, and making themselves remembered to this day by some of the people in whose houses they stayed.

Reginald mildly asked James on their journey whether he called this going to Italy to study art. But James said in reply, "Let me see the Porta Nigra, and I will fly south as true as a swallow." And Reginald laughed, and trod on with him through the mud, until they had seen the Porta Nigra.

Then they headed back to the dear old Rhine, through the volcanic country, looking by their way on lakes hundreds of fathoms deep, blue from their depth as the great ocean, yet lying in great hollows among smooth short-grassed downs, where the sheep were feeding and the lambs were crying. And they saw an eagle, and a wolf, and a wild boar just killed; and, having looked in on the Apollinaris Kirche, they quietly descended on Andernach.

Here they met a very old friend of a fortnight's standing. They had made a halt at Bonn of a few days, and had struck up a friendship, which was to be more than life-long with several students there. The students among whom they had accidentally fallen were of course democratic. The "Cross" party at Bonn is as exclusive as Christ-Church. Happy-go-lucky James and Reginald, after a fortnight's examination of the question, were quite prepared to be convinced that hereditary governors were a mere temporary stop-gap between the feudalism of the past and the democracy of the future. They did little more than bargain for Queen Victoria: at whose name the students took off their caps. As for the Prince of Wales, they gave him up. Among these terrible young gentlemen (who turn out the gentlest of beings as soon as they have a place and get married) they had come to the conclusion that Queen Victoria was the last crowned head which would be allowed to exist on the continent of Europe, and that she was only permitted to exist in consequence of her virtues as mother, wife, and woman.

Then there was the business of the map of Europe again. These students had settled that, among other things, England was to have Egypt, but not to be allowed any further territory in Europe, being too overwhelmingly powerful; Alsace to a united Germany; and all that sort of thing; but always England to be served first, and bought, and kept from interfering. Or again she *was* to interfere and arouse democracy, nationality, and what not: for they believed in her power then.

Our two boys also believed in all this. And one of the loudest democratic talkers of Bonn, under a cloud about a duel, met them at Andernach.

This youth was more of a geographical than a political radical. The form of government you might choose to adopt was a mere insignificant matter of detail to his enlarged and statesmanlike mind. So long as you restored absorbed nationalities, he was ready to congratulate Ireland or Poland in reverting to their original form of government. This young man walked up and down the street with our two friends for an hour or so, talking the most frantic nonsense about the Italian business: not unwatched.

At length they all agreed that refreshment was necessary, and the German boy, cocking his cap over his eye, and breaking out with—

" Mihi sit propositum
In taberna mori;
Vinum est oppositum,
Morientis ori."

led them to a little *gasthaus*, taking care to inform them that the landlord's principles were sound ; from which James and Reginald concluded that he was a man not only violently disaffected towards the powers that were, but permanently disaffected towards any possible powers which ever might be hereafter. James's jolly humour made him half laugh at this kind of thing, but there was an air of mystery and adventure about it which made it very pleasant. He began to think that it would be very fine to have the prestige of belonging to one of these secret societies, more especially in such a very tight-laced state as Prussia. He followed his German friend, hoping to see some real Vehmgericht business at all events for once in his life.

The student made a sign to the host on entering, and immediately the host pretended, in the most patent manner, that he had never seen the student before, which interested and amused James, as it also did a Prussian police-official who was sitting at a table drinking. Then they passed mysteriously into an inner apartment, and shut the door after them : and the Prussian official and the host winked at one another, and laughed.

"You are not going to trouble those English boys?" said the landlord.

"Not I," said the policeman, "but I want *him*."

"For what?"

"Duelling. He went near to slit Von Azeldorf's nose."

"Pity he did not. The ass will make out a political offence, and become a martyr."

"Of course the ass will. But he must slit the nose of one of his own order in future."

"True," said the host, thoughtfully.

The student led our friends into an inner parlour, and brought them up to a large lithographic print, before which he took off his cap, put his hands across his breast, and bowed. The print was well conceived and executed, and represented this :—Hungaria lay dead in her coffin. Kossuth, with a fold of his cloak masking his mouth, was taking a last farewell look at her face, before the coffin should be closed. At the head of the corpse stood the pale ghost of Liberty, staring with a calm frozen face at Georgey, who was in the right-hand corner, with a face distorted by terror and remorse, calling on the rocks to cover him, and the hills to hide him. (In reality, Georgey was comfortably at his own chateau, hard at work, with nets, pins, and corks, completing his almost unrivalled collection of butterflies and moths, and perfectly easy in his mind. But we must have political caricatures.) The print was well drawn, and well executed, and our two boys were struck

by it extremely, though the sad fact must remain that they had neither of them heard of Georgey in their lives.

"There he stands," said their student friend. "False and perjured traitor, with the blood of the slain Hungaria choking the lies which would rise to his mouth. Georgey—Georgey," he was going on, when a very quiet weak voice behind him said, in German,—

"It was a strong measure, certainly, that of Georgey's. I confess I should not have been prepared to act so myself; but in the end Hungary will be the better, and Austria no worse."

They turned, and saw before them one of the strangest-looking men ever seen by any of the three—a man with a face as beardless as a boy's, as old-looking as a grandfather's; a face of great beauty and power, with large, clear, luminous eyes, and a complexion like pale wax, without a wrinkle. The figure was not large, but well proportioned and graceful; the carriage was erect and bold, yet very calm and quiet, showing physical weakness, as of a man recovering from a great illness. Having said his say, he leant against the closed door, and surveyed them quietly and silently.

The German student took off his cap; Reginald stared as though he had seen a ghost; James was the first to recover his presence of mind. He cried out—

"My dear sir——"

"You will write out," said Arthur Silcote, smiling, "the first book of Euclid before to-morrow morning, and bring it to my desk at the opening of school. '*De tabernis non frequentandis*,' you know. You have violated one of our statutes, my boy. What is going to happen to this young gentleman?"

The young German student was being arrested. The policeman from the next room had come in, and had "taken" him.

"What has he done, then?" asked Arthur Silcote.

"He has been duelling," said the police.

"And has not '*Von*' before his name," said Arthur, after the young gentleman was removed. "Well, my boys, you seem to be getting into good company."

"We are seeing the world, sir," said James, laughing.

"One side of it, boy; one side of it."

"A very amusing side, sir, surely."

"Surely!" said Arthur. "When you hear a man use the word '*surely*,' you always know that he is not '*sure*' at all. That miserable tentative word '*surely*' exasperates me. Don't use it again."

"I will not, sir. You are not angry with me?"

"Why, no," said Arthur, smiling. "I seldom ask great favours from people with whom I am angry, and I am going to ask a great favour of you."

James waited and wondered.

"I have been very ill. I have been deceived by the doctors as to the cause of my illness. They told me that my heart was hopelessly deranged, and that my life was not worth a fortnight's purchase. This has turned out to be all a falsehood. I am as good a man as ever, with a new lease of life before me. I have merely overworked myself, and I want rest. But this foolish falsehood of the doctors has produced its effect. I came abroad, leaving all my old friends, to die alone like a hunted deer. Mayo, at Boppard, tells me that I am to live, and stakes his reputation upon it. He has turned me out from his establishment to wander and amuse myself. Will you let me wander with you? This new life, the assurance of which I get from Mayo, has become unexpectedly dear to me. I did not fear death; I only *hated* it. Death always seemed to me, if I dare say so, a mistake. I never doubted for one moment the continuity of my existence; I never had any physical fear of the great break in it: I only *hated* that break. I believe that I hate that great, and, as it seemed to me sometimes, *unnecessary* break in my existence as much as ever: but Mayo, the great expert, has removed it at least twenty years. I have a new life before me. Can you understand all this?"

"Well! well! sir," said James.

"I was fresher and freer once," said Arthur, "than you are now. In the old times, when Tom and I used to go and see Algy at Oxford, I was as fresh and as free as any one. And Algy is dead, and Tom is worse than dead: and I *have* been dead, boy."

"Dead, sir!" said James, wondering.

"Ay, dead: to hope and to ambition, and to much else. I have been dead, my boy, in a way, but I have come to life again. Come, let us walk together, and spend the day. At the end of it, you shall tell me if I seem likely to suit you as a travelling companion or not."

"I can tell you that at once, sir. We shall be honoured and favoured by your company. I rather think that we are a little too young to do *entirely* without advice: have we not just seen our chosen companion walked off to gaol under our eyes? I am very indiscreet—no doubt—for my age; and as for Reginald, he is the soul of discretion and reticence. But we have made rather a mess of it hitherto, and there are heaps of things I want to know and cannot find out. And you are all alone, and want

taking care of. We will take care of you if you will take care of us."

"These are all kind commonplaces," said Arthur. "But give me a trial. I am all alone in the world; I have been very ill, and I am slowly recovering. I shall be a drag on you, but I ask you in charity's sake for your company."

James tried to answer, but could not. To see a man whom he had always regarded as a prig and a bully brought so low as this affected him strongly. Reginald had dropped away from them, and they were sauntering up beside the Rhine stream together and alone.

"Why are you silent?" asked Arthur.

"Because," said James, "I wish I had known you better before."

"That would have been but of little use," said Arthur. "As a fact, nobody did, except perhaps Algernon, who is dead and gone. I was a failure. Try to know me now, and it is quite possible that you will like me."

What simple James answered is not of much consequence. Arthur talked on to him, as the Ancient Mariner talked to the first person he could get hold of."

"The *hatred* of death—not the *fear*, mind—which has been hanging over me so long ruined and spoilt me. The doctors in their ignorance, gave me warning that I could not live, a long while ago. They told me that I had organic disease of the heart, and went far to ruin my life. It appears that such is not the case. I am a new man again. What the expectation of death could not do, the removal of that expectation has done. Bear with me a little, and see."

"James only half understood him; but he answered:—

"One thing is plain, sir; you want attending to and looking after; and I will do that for you. Our meeting with you is a great stroke of good luck."

"But you will want to ramble and range about, and I cannot do that."

"We can ramble," said James, "all day while you sit at home, and at night we can come back and tell you all about the day's work or the day's play. It shall go hard, between my sketches and my talk, if you do not enjoy the day as much as we do?"

So he joined them, and they rambled away together southward through Bavaria towards Salzburg.

James was at first extremely afraid of the terrible inexorably-tongued Arthur. Then he was surprised and frightened at the great change in him; and at last got perfectly confidential with

him, and actually went so far as to tell him one night that he had been utterly deceived in his estimate of his character. I doubt that James had been drinking the wine of the country.

"You mean," said Arthur, "that I am not the priggish bully you took me for."

"The words are yours, sir. You were never either prig or bully. But you were so hard and inexorable. Now you are so gentle and complacent in everything. A child could not be more biddable than you are?"

"Yes; but in old times I was a schoolmaster," said Arthur, "now I *am* a child. Did I not tell you that I was new-born? I have a new lease of life given me on the highest authority. Life with me is not so enjoyable as it is with you. I am twenty years older than you: I cannot come and go, and enjoy every flower and shadow as you can. Yet life is a glorious good, and death is a terrible evil: ah! you may make what you like of it, but it is the greatest of misfortunes, that break in the continuity. But what do you know of death? Death has been with me night and day for many years. He is gone now, and I am as much a boy as you are, save that I cannot enjoy the world as you can. Do you understand me?"

"I think I do, sir," said James, gravely.

"This perfect rest and absence of anxiety (for Algernon is in heaven), combined with your kindly ministrations and attentions, are making a man of me again. Is it not so?"

"You gain in strength and colour every day, sir," said James. "And yet——"

"And yet, you would say, my old temper does not return. Am I not changed, then?"

"You are your real self now, sir. That seems to be the truth."

"Let us hope so," said Arthur. "I think so myself. But, with my returning health, the old Adam is somewhat moving. The lassitude of my illness is going away; and I begin to feel a want for motion, for action, for something to stir me. Take me south, James, and let us see this war. There is sport afield there."

"What war, sir?"

"Oh, you young dolt," said Arthur, laughing. "Give me the footstool, that I may throw it at your head. What war? Why the grand crash between France and Austria, the stake of which is an Italian kingdom. I see how to enjoy life: to cultivate a careful ignorance on political matters."

"But the *Kölnische Zeitung* says that they are not going to fight," remarked James.

"The *Fliegende Blätter* may probably say the same," said Arthur. "Boy! boy! there is going to be 'a great thing,' as the foxhunters say. Take me south to see it. You can sketch it, and sell your sketches. I want motion, life: let us go."

"We will go, sir, certainly if you really think they will fight, and if you are able for it."

"You shall carry me," said Arthur. "My brother is in the business, and on the winning side. Old Austria for ever, in spite of all her faults."

"Which of your brothers is in the business, sir?" asked James.

"Tom," said Arthur. "Heaven help the Frenchman who meets him."

"I remember him," said James, "a kind man with a gentle face. He carried me to Silcotes in his arms once, after I had been beaten by poachers. By the bye, *you* were there. Do you remember it?"

"I do, now you mention it," said Arthur. "And you are that poor little thing in the smock-frock that Tom brought in his arms. I never exactly realized it till now. How things come round through all kinds of confusion! My silly old aunt took you to bed that night; and you made your first acquaintance with Dora, and Anne, and Reginald. Well, then, it is settled that we are to go south, and see this war."

"I glory in the idea, sir," said James. "I have never looked on war."

"Nor I," said Arthur. "It will be a cold bath for both of us. The accessories will not be pleasant; but it will do us both good. A review on a grand scale, with the small and yet important fact of death superadded; and a kingdom of twenty millions for the stake. A University boat-race, in which the devil actually does take the hindmost. Let us go, by all means."

CHAPTER XLVII.

ARTHUR DEALS WITH KRIEGSTHURM'S ASSASSINS.

ARTHUR, with his two pleasant companions, James and Reginald, went pleasantly on southward past Coblenz, past Heidelberg, Stuttgart, to Munich, where perforce there was a little delay. Arthur was for pushing on as quickly as possible, and indeed

grumbled good-humouredly at being taken so far eastward at all ; but the boys were too strong for him. They had made the acquaintance of Kaulbach at the Apollinaris Kirche, and also in the Cathedral windows at Cologne ; and they were determined to go to the home of the man whom, after Landseer and Tenniel, they placed as the greatest living master in Europe. They talked Kaulbach, and imitated him, Arthur, with a calm smile always in his face, laughing at them, and measuring their human figures with an inexorable pair of compasses which he had, greatly to their discomfiture.

“ If you can draw the human figure correctly and rapidly at thirty, boys,” he used to say, “ you will be able to do as much as any Englishman, save six, can. Patience and work first ; freedom afterwards. Nevertheless, go it ! This man’s right leg is longer than his left, but it will shorten in time. There are men at the top of the tree who can’t for the life of them draw a man’s legs of the same length. So go it. Who knows what you may do by hard work ? You may be able to draw as well as a fourth-class Frenchman some day. Go it ! ”

They were thoroughly happy these three on this journey, and they took notes of one another to their mutual surprise.

Arthur, of course, never dreamt that James was his own nephew : only four people knew that as yet. May I call the reader’s attention to this fact ?—Silcote’s extremely slight attentions to James had all taken place before Silcote knew that James was his own grandson. Rumour, dealing with an unaccountable man like the Squire, had developed these few growling attentions into a theory that Silcote would make him his heir. Lord Hainault, surely a safe man, entirely believed this preposterous fiction. To worship properly the goddess Fama you must live in the country. She gets pretty well worshipped in town, at clubs and in drawing-rooms ; but her temples are in the counties.

“ Reginald,” mused Arthur, “ is an ass. The only redeeming point in him is his respect and love for this peasant boy James. And the most unfortunate part of the business is, that now dear old Algy is dead it is more than probable that Reginald will be made heir. And he will marry that silly little Anne. Confound it ! all the property sha’n’t go like that. There has been sin enough and bother enough in getting it together and keeping it together. There is some sentimental feeling my father has toward Algernon’s mother, which will come into play now the dear old boy is dead. And he will leave everything to Reginald on condition of his marrying Anne. I wish to heaven that this James Sugden was a Silcote and heir.

"But I will not stand this," he added aloud, rising up and pacing the fifth room of their long suite of apartments at Munich. "No," he went on, throwing open the door and bursting into the fourth room—"I will be heir myself sooner. He offered the place to me once. I will hold him to his bargain."

Kriegsturm and the Princess never were further at sea than he was just now. His wits were somewhat got together by noticing that James was sitting upon the floor, and his painting tools were scattered far and wide.

"What is the matter, James?" he asked. "Why I was just thinking of you!"

"I should hardly have thought it, sir," said James, laughing. "You have knocked me and my apparatus over so cleverly that I should have thought that you were thinking of some one else."

"Did I knock you over?" asked Arthur, earnestly.

"Well, with the assistance of the door you did, sir."

"I am extremely sorry, my good fellow," said Arthur, anxiously. "I was in hopes that those fits of half-unconscious absence were entirely gone; but I am getting the better of them, decidedly. This must be the very last of them. Let me help you to pick up your paints. You should not have sat so near the door, and I should not have opened it so quickly. We were both in the wrong."

"I sat there for the light, sir."

"Then you are in the right and I am in the wrong. I will make amends. I consent to go to Salzburg without further opposition: out of our way as it is."

"You are very kind, sir. I *did* want to see it so much."

James on his part noticed with wonder several things about Arthur. His irritability was gone; that was the first thing. Moreover, he never dictated, but consulted quietly with James, sometimes even with Reginald, and yielded easily. His old rapid vivacious activity had given place to a quiet contemplative habit of body and mind. He was, for the first time in his life, tolerant of inactivity, and seemed to like it. He was tolerant of trifles,—nay, began to be interested in them. James, for instance, got himself a wonderful waistcoat at Munich, which had to be altered, and Arthur took the deepest interest in the alteration. He began to talk to casual people at the *cafés*, and found them out to be the most wonderful people ever seen or heard of. He told James that gardening was a neglected art, and that he certainly should take it in hand as soon as he got to England again; bought *Reine Marguerite* and stock seeds, and packed them off to Silcotes to the gardener, with many directions, regardless of expense. He was

going to learn to paint (under James's directions), he was going to shoot, he was going to fish, all quietly and in good time, with the best advice (as he was before he went to Boppard, he would have consulted Blaine's "Encyclopædia" over night, and ridden a steeplechase next morning). At present his principal employment was learning of military tactics, because "James had promised to take him to the war."

A change indeed: but what wonder? He was a man of keen vivacious intellect, with as much wish to enjoy life as he had when he used to run with the boats at Oxford years ago, when he, and Algernon, and Tom were young and innocent. The doctors had condemned him to death; and he had got his reprieve. He was young, and he had begun once more to love life and what life can give most dearly; and that new-found love had softened and changed him.

Piloty and Kaulbach were to look to their laurels. The son of Mrs. Tom Silcote was not likely to be balked by want of audacity, or tiresome attention to such little matters as correct drawing. In three close days, James had produced a really fine historical picture (barring drawbacks, such for instance as that no dealer would have given five pounds for it, and that all the legs and arms were odd ones). There was no sky; but the Roman amphitheatre, with tier after tier of almost innumerable spectators, was piled up to the top of the canvas. Close to you, divided from the arena by a deep space of boarding, lolled the Roman emperor; fat, gross, and in purple, looking with a lazy drunken leer at what was passing in the scene below in the foreground. Behind him was dandy Petronius smoothing his beard, and looking at nothing; and others, not to be mentioned here, but with whom every school-boy who has handled *Lemprière*, the first book generally put into his hand, is perfectly familiar. In the extreme foreground of this picture of James's were two boys, Christians, condemned to the lions, one about eighteen, the other about sixteen. The elder, with a short sword drawn back behind his hip, was looking at *you*, with parted lips, ready for battle, while his brother cowered behind him in utter ghastly terror. Between you and them, on the sand, was the shadow of a crouching lion. *You* were the lion: despair and terror were close to you in these handsome lads; above them were the unutterable luxury and vice described by Suetonius (if he lies not) in the person of the Emperor and Sporus; beyond, tier after tier, the wicked, cruel old world, which exists now only in Spain, and in the colonies of the Latin races which still exist in America.

"That is very fine," said Arthur. "I give you credit for great

genius. Piloty would have drawn better, but he could not have conceived better. Will you give me this ? ”

“ Of course I will, sir, heartily.”

“ Now for some flake white and megilp ; Roberson’s medium, hey ? Well, I am agreeable.” And so, with flake white and Roberson’s medium, he daubed the whole thing out.

“ It was hardly such a ‘ bung ’ as to deserve that, sir,” said James, quietly.

“ It was no ‘ bung,’ ” said Arthur ; “ only try another subject next time.”

“ I learnt that at school, sir.”

“ Then forget it. You would never have attempted this picture if you had not come to Munich. Let us go on to Salzburg at once, and get your foolish will accomplished there. After that, mind, we go inexorably south-westward.”

“ I will follow you, sir.”

“ Change the conversation. What do you like best ? ”

James, very much alarmed after the destruction of his picture lest the old Arthur should have returned, and the new Arthur have been only a deceiving fiend sent to lure him to his destruction, replied :—

“ That is a very difficult question to answer, sir.”

“ But you can answer it, surely, my boy. I only asked for what you liked best ; surely you can answer that.”

“ Well,” said James, speaking to the new Arthur, “ I consider Mayduke cherries as fine as anything. Speaking about this part of the world, I should say that the vanille ices which Reg and I had at Aix-la-Chapelle, washed down with Bairischer, were as good as anything.”

“ Heaven help his stomach. Ices and small beer ! You’ll be grey at forty ! ” exclaimed Arthur. “ How ill you were at Aix-la-Chapelle ? ”

“ Not very. I felt as if I had been drinking out of the blood-hounds’ pan at Silcotes, and swallowed the brinstone ; but that was the waters. Also I dreamt for the next fortnight that I had stolen a sitting of rotten eggs, and eaten them : that was also the waters. Reg shut up, and had the doctor.”

“ After the ices and beer ? ”

“ Exactly,” said James.

“ What I want to get at is this,” said Arthur. “ You enjoy life. What is it which makes life so enjoyable to you ? ”

“ I have no idea,” said James.

“ You must have some sort of an idea. You are not a fool. Think.”

"Well," said James, after a pause. "I should say 'hope.' Hope of generally bettering myself: of rising higher some time or another. Succeeding in art, and rising to the position of having a house of my own—and—so on."

"I want to learn how to enjoy life," said Arthur. "It seems to me that no one could tell me better than yourself. As I understand you, your way of enjoying life is to wrap yourself up *in* yourself, and think only of your own personal advancement. I suppose you are right. Yet I am disappointed."

"You are quite wrong," said James: "I have no self. All that I think, attempt, or do, is done for another, and she is alone, nearly friendless, I doubt, and for aught I know penniless. I——"

"There, no more of it," said Arthur. "I understand there is another, then. That is all I wanted to know; never mind sentimental details. You would not enjoy life if there was not a chance of some one else enjoying it with you. I have heard all I wanted. Now for Salzburg to-morrow, for I want to get down to the war, and we shall be late."

They had been three days at Salzburg, when Arthur, sitting quietly in his chair and reading, had, like a vast number of other men in a vast number of other stories, his attention called to a knock at the door, whereupon he called out, "Come in."

There entered a pale, beardless man of about thirty-five, dressed in plain black. Arthur had time to notice that this man had very steady and beautiful eyes, before he rose from his seat and bowed deferentially to him.

The stranger bowed low also, and spoke in English, and not very good English either, using however the universal French title, as being the safest. "Monsieur, I think, labours under a mistake as to my social rank. I beg Monsieur to be seated, as I only come as a suitor, asking a favour."

"You have got a beautiful tender face of your own, Mr. Sir," thought Arthur, as he seated himself with a bow; "your wife did not want much wooing, I fancy."

And the stranger said, also to *himself*, "You are a fine-looking man, my pale, beardless priest. Twelve such as you among us would make twelve or thirteen crowns shake. Kriegsturm never reckoned on *you*."

Arthur began by saying pleasantly, "I am at your commands, sir."

"I understand, sir," said Boginsky, "that you wish to go south to the war. I come to offer my services as courier, factotum, valet, what you will."

"We never contemplated engaging the services of a gentleman in any of those capacities," replied Arthur. "We intend to go as mere happy-go-lucky Englishmen, see what we can, and imagine what we can't. I really think that we do not want you."

"I really think that you do," said Boginsky. "You are absolutely ignorant of military matters. I am a soldier, a general who has commanded a brigade; I will not at present say a division. I speak every language spoken in the Austrian army; you certainly do not. I am safe by an Austrian police passport on this side of the soon-to-be-changed boundary; as soon as we are in Italy I am at home, Pole as I am, with the meanest man in the army. I am extremely poor, which is in your favour (unless you commit the error of paying me too highly, and so making me independent of you). I am very amiable and good-natured, which is in your favour also; I am (personally, not politically) quite desperate, which is again in your favour; and, what is more in your favour than all, I like your personal appearance, and you like mine."

"You tempt me," said Arthur, fairly laughing. "As a general rule, I find that this plain outspoken boldness, with a specimen of which you have just favoured me, is the inseparable accident (to go no further) of a designing person, who possesses the moral qualities of boldness and physical courage. You accuse me of liking your personal appearance. I confess it. I want, however, further tempting. May I ask, for instance, how a high-bred gentleman like yourself finds himself in this position?"

"You have not dabbled, then, with political changes, tending to democracy?"

"Theoretically, yes; practically, no," replied Arthur. "I have knocked together as many constitutions as Sièyes, if that is any use to you."

"Yes; but it is not, you know," said Boginsky. "In England and America all that sort of thing may be done uncommonly cheap. Men in England, for instance, of the aristocratic class, who live by social distinctions, or at least get all their prestige from them, habitually take this tiger-kitten of democracy into their drawing-rooms, and call it pretty dear, and say, 'Was there ever such a pretty, harmless kitten in this world?' When the tiger-kitten grows to a real tiger, and shows its nails, if they stroke its velvet pads, these men say, 'Out on the nasty, ungrateful beast!' and thank God that they are Whigs. I speak, I tell you fairly, as a headlong democrat, —as a man who, whether right or wrong, believes that universal democracy is only a matter of time, and as

a man who has sacrificed marriage, wealth, home, friends, position, for my idea, knowing well all the time that I should be dead and rotten in my grave years before my idea had become realized."

Arthur rose and stood before the man, and bowed his head in sheer respect to him. Here was a man with a faith; a faith which, unluckily, as he thought at first, brought a new Gospel with it; but afterwards he asked himself whether or no it was not the real old Gospel after all. How he settled this matter is no possible business of mine. I am not Arthur Silcote's keeper.

Boginsky went on. "I have said too much possibly, possibly too little. Let it go. You ask me how a nobleman like myself found myself in this position, and I answer by challenging you to air the mildest and most innocent of your Sièyes constitutions on the continent of Europe. You said also that you wanted further tempting; I cannot tempt you further. You aroused the devil or the angel in me somehow, and I have no further courtesies to interchange with you. I make you once more the offer that I should go to the war with you in a menial capacity. I like you and your looks, but I am getting weary of life."

"Come with us, then," said Arthur; "come frankly and heartily. We are rich, ignorant, and perhaps Philistine; certainly indiscreet by taking you, of whom we know nothing, except that you are a dangerous conspirator. Join us, not as a servant, but as companion. We of course pay all expenses; and as for any extra honorarium, you had better leave that to one of the Silcotes, possibly the most extravagant and open-handed family in England, according to their lights and their means. The bargain is struck?"

"Certainly."

"Then there is one other little detail to which to call your attention. I have not the pleasure of knowing your name."

"Boginsky."

"What Boginsky?" said Arthur, in wonder.

"The younger Boginsky himself. No other."

Arthur, who had been standing up until now, sank back in his chair and took up his book. "Come and take off my boots, General," he said. "Let it be written on my tomb, that he had his boots taken off by the most brilliant guerilla democratic general in Europe. So this is what continental democracy brings a man to! My dear Count, have you dined?"*

* This is not impossible. If the reader had seen the younger Boginsky where I saw him, he would know it: one says nothing of Fangipanni, still less of Napoleon at Ham. Yet things are distinctly better for unsuccessful continental politicians than they were. Mont St. Michael itself has become a sentimental show place, where idle contributors to

"I really have not," said Boginsky. "But I have got so very much used to hunger, among other things, that I can well wait. After I have served your dinner for you, I shall be glad of the scraps."

"Don't speak to me like that again, Count," said Arthur, sharply. "I beg you to remember that there are such animals still left in the world as English gentlemen. You are our guest from this moment. If I have offended you by my coarse insular jest of asking you to take my boots off, I have only to say that it was through its utter incongruity, the highest compliment which my stupidity suggested to me. Take my book, sir, and make yourself comfortable. I will go after dinner, and try to find out when my two erratic boys are likely to be at home." And so he went.

Boginsky sat, and began looking at his book, but not reading it. "That man is a gentleman," he said after a time. "And he will make a gentleman of me again. God help me. I have risen very high. I have given up everything: name, fame, life, position, and the power of doing good, I fear, also. Yet I have fallen very low; I have taken Austrian money from Kriegsturm: and I have offered to be this man's valet. No man of the present generation will be alive to see democracy on its legs. Garibaldi goes for monarchy. It is very hard. The forty years in the desert shadowed it out to us. Frangipanni will see his will worked out; he will see Italy united under a bull-faced Sardinian chamois-hunter. But as for the poor democrats—I wonder whether we shall be conscious of what goes on after death. I *should* like to see the old cause triumph. But then again I would sooner die the second death, and be annihilated utterly,—cease to be, if that were possible,—than see it beaten. I am mazed with it all. Suppose we got it and it failed!

"This gentle Englishman is gone after his boys. I will read my book then: Edmund About. You will not do much for us, or such as you. Our heads are weary, and some of us are getting fierce. 'Sans compter le petit Mortara.' That is very good, and makes one laugh, though one wishes one's work was done and that one were dead. We sha'n't get much out of you French, at least if your opposition is led by Thiers, whose own mild democracy means mere French aggrandizement."

When Arthur came back he found him walking thoughtfully up

this Magazine may get themselves shut up in dungeons, and what is still better, get let out again by knocking at the door. In England, America, and, last and most glorious, in Italy (of all places in the world), unsuccessful continental politicians are *safe*.

and down the room. "I have something very particular and important to say to you, Mr. Silcote," he said.

Arthur was all attention.

"I wish to tell you, sir, to what I owe the honour of your acquaintance. From one reason or another I found myself, but a few days ago, in extreme poverty and considerable danger at Vienna: I accepted a mission to this place which gave me safety and a little money. I was commissioned to seek your *protégé* Sugden here, and involve him with the police."

"And you *accepted* this mission?" said Arthur with emphasis.

"I do not look much like a deceiver of youth," said Boginsky, laughing. "I accepted the mission lest a worse man might be sent on it. But I would hardly have thought it necessary to speak to you on the subject had it not been that I have too much reason to fear that the plot against this innocent youth has developed into something much darker and fouler than merely involving him with the police; and that it is my duty to warn you against what may be a very serious disaster."

Arthur sat down and watched him intently.

"The man who sent me has evidently distrusted me, and sent another to watch me. Kriegsturm is losing his head, or he would never have made the mistake of sending a lad whom I *know* to watch me. Had I ever intended to carry out his intentions, this act of his of setting a spy on me would have absolved me from my engagement with him. Will you come to the window with me?"

They went. Boginsky pointed to a figure lying lazily on a bench under some linden-trees,—the figure of a handsome olive-complexioned youth tolerably well dressed, lying in a beautiful careless artistic attitude, with his face turned towards their house.

"That young man," said Boginsky, "is a young Roman democrat, known to me, although my person is unknown to him. I have gathered from him that he is commissioned by Kriegsturm to watch your young friend James Sugden, and to report on all our proceedings. He came to Vienna in the suite of Miss Heathton, the travelling governess of Miss Anne Silcote. He was abruptly discharged from their suite, because he was unable to keep to himself his frantic admiration for Miss Silcote. The man who commissioned him, Kriegsturm, has inflamed his mind to madness by telling him that Miss Anne Silcote is devotedly attached to this Paris apple of a boy James. The young dog is a worthless member of a good Roman family, among whose family traditions is assassination. Whether he carries knives or Orsini bombs I cannot say; but he has a nasty dangerous look about the

eyes. I only know that if I saw him handling anything like a black cricket-ball, with ten or a dozen short spikes on it, I should shout 'Orsini!' run down the street, and never stop till I got round the next corner."

"Do you mean to say there is a probability of his murdering James?"

"No, not a probability, but an absolute certainty," said Boginsky. "I rather think that I am included in the black list myself."

"If it were not for your shrewd face and your calm quiet eyes, I should think that you were mad," said Arthur. "This is going to see the war with a vengeance. But I cannot make head or tale of the story yet. What possible cause of anger can this Kriegsthum have against James?"

"Kriegsthum *inter alia* is right-hand man to your aunt the Princess Castelnovo. He was her confidant in some old political plots, and in other things of which I cannot speak to you, you being her nephew and a gentleman. She is devoted to your brother Thomas, and wishes to see him in possession of the family estates. Kriegsthum's interest is, of course, the same as that of Colonel Silcote your brother, of whom again, as your brother, I wish to speak with the profoundest respect. I only speak of Kriegsthum. Kriegsthum is apt to be unscrupulous at times (he could have stopped Orsini, but did not), and this boy, James Sugden, stands alone between the inheritance of the estates and Colonel Silcote. Consequently Kriegsthum wishes him out of the way. And so you have a noble young Roman lying on a bench in front of your door, with knives in his boots, and, for anything I know, explosive black cricket-balls covered with percussion spikes in his coat pockets. If he were to tumble off that bench now, and exploding his bombs to go off in a flame of fire, I might be pleased, but should not be in the least surprised. A British newspaper would describe it as a 'remarkable accident,' and a British jury would bring in verdict as 'Death by the visitation of God.' But I have suffered by continental politics, and understand them. That young man is dangerous."

"You ought all to be in Bedlam together," bounced out Arthur. "James Sugden the next in succession! Why, he is a peasant boy born near the park-gates! My father, who hates boys beyond measure, has never interchanged fifty words with him altogether. I am my father's heir. I, who speak, come into entire possession of three-fourths of the whole property at my father's death. I objected to the arrangement, but he has persisted in it, and I have a letter upstairs from my father's lawyer assuring me of the fact;

written, I believe, by my father's orders, in consequence of some old and worthless papers having been stolen from his bedroom by his servants. The boy Sugden has no more to do with my father's will than you have, and the rogue Kriegsthum must be mad."

"There you spoke right, sir," said Boginsky; "there you spoke very well indeed. Our good old Kriegsthum has lost his head, and with his head his morality political, and other. I have feared it for some time; and I dread that what you say is too true. He has been going wrong for some time. His principles were really sound and democratic at one time, but he got debauched. He trimmed too much. I noticed, years ago, that he was in possession of the arguments of our opponents, and could state them logically,—a fatal thing in politics; then I noticed that he would talk, and even eat and drink, with aristocrats,—a still more fatal fact against him. It was followed, of course, by his taking to charlatanism, to table-rapping, and spirit-calling; and ended, of course, by his being involved with the great authors of all confusion, the Silcotes. Poor old Kriegsthum! He has lost his head by plotting without principle. Dear old fellow! I must write to Frangipanni about him. Frangipanni has a great deal of influence with him. Poor old Kriegsthum! I am so sorry for him."

"Yet he compassed your death," said Arthur, looking keenly into Boginsky's face, and thinking, "I wish I had *your* face."

Boginsky, looking at Arthur, and thinking, "I wish I was like you," replied, "This is a mere matter of detail. Kriegsthum is a man who acts from settled rules. I interfered with his plans, and he wished me removed. You would hardly object to him for that, would you?"

"But," said Arthur, aghast, "if I interfered with your plans for the regeneration of the human race, you would not murder me, would you?"

"I?" said Boginsky, "certainly not. I hold that it is utterly indefensible for one man to take another man's life. I hold that the taking of human life in any way, judicial or not judicial, is the greatest sin which a man can commit."

"Yet you defended Vienna, and fought with your own right hand, and slew. Did you not commit the great sin then?"

"True," said Boginsky, "I sinned in defending Vienna, forasmuch as I took human life. But the virtue of the defence counterbalanced the sin of the slaughter of my fellow-men. Are you so insularly stupid as not to see that? Besides, it often becomes necessary to commit a great crime to practise a

noble piece of virtue: in which case the greater the crime the greater the virtue."

At this astounding piece of logic and ethics Arthur gave a great gasp, and stood staring at him in dismay. He would fain have argued with him, but the heresy was too vast and too amorphous to begin on. There was, as he afterwards expressed it, no right end to it, no handle, and so it was impossible to say where to take hold of it.

"Well, there is no doubt about one thing, sir," he said. "We owe you a very great obligation, and will try to repay it. We will concert measures for our young friend's safety."

"We will discuss the matter, sir," said Boginsky. "Remember, only, please, that to compromise him here is to compromise me. Meanwhile we will talk over our route. I will undertake to keep my eye on the young Roman gentleman."

They talked for an hour, and decided to go towards Turin. The route was extremely difficult, which was a great recommendation.

At the end of the hour Boginsky took his departure to make arrangements. Arthur, looking out of the window, and seeing the noble Roman still on the bench, began dimly to realize that he was actually in foreign parts, and that this young man, with his potential knives and Orsini bombs, was not only a reality, but an intolerable nuisance to be at once abated.

"I wish you were on a bench in Christchurch Meadow my dear young friend," he thought, "and that I was proctor. I have sent as good men as you down for a year for half as much. Hang it," he continued aloud, "I'll try it; I'll proctorize him. I will, upon my word and honour. If he shies one of his petards at me, I am cricketer enough to catch it. I never was a butter-fingers, though a bad batter. If he tries his knives on me, I will punch his head. I'll proctorize him!"

Whether to go close to him to avoid his petards, or to keep away from him to avoid his knives, he could not in the least degree decide. He ended by pursuing the old English (and French) method of laying himself yardarm to the enemy, and boarding him suddenly. He went straight up to our apparently slumbering young friend, shook him by the shoulder, and said roughly and loudly in French, which will be better given in vernacular than with his pedantic ill-translated Oxfordisms—

"Get up, sir! How dare you lie here? What do you mean, you miserable young assassin, by watching a subject of Her Britannic Majesty in this scandalous manner? I am a

civis Romanus, sir, with all the power of the British empire at my back."

The startled youth staggered to his feet, and put his right hand under his jacket.

"Don't attempt anything of the sort, sir," said Arthur, perfectly aware that he was in extreme danger of his life, but perfectly cool, and blundering between rusty French and proctorial recollections. "I shall permit nothing of the sort for a moment, sir. I shall write to your father, sir."

"Who are you, and what authority have you over me?" said the youth, with parted lips and dangerous eyes.

"That is no business of yours, sir," replied Arthur, running into English, which the youth, luckily, understood. "Authority, indeed! You will call" (he was just going to say, "You will call on me at eight o'clock to-morrow morning," but saved himself) "down the vengeance of Heaven on your head, sir, if you consistently and pertinaciously persist in going on in your present course, sir; and from a careful study of your character, extending over the whole period of your career, I fear that such will be the case. Now you just take your hand from under your jacket, you murderous young cub, for I am a short-tempered man, and will give you the best thrashing you ever had in your life, if you don't."

The Roman did so, and smiling faintly said—

"Monsieur has some cause of complaint against me; Monsieur said he was a Roman just now."

"I *am* a Roman," replied Arthur, seeing he was wavering, in headlong heat, "in the Palmerstonian acceptance of the term, sir—an acceptance which I should be inclined to think would not easily be comprehended by a person of your extremely limited abilities, dissipated habits, and murderous intentions. You will go down for a year, sir, and I shall write to your father."

"My father is dead, sir," said the astonished and frightened Italian.

"That does not make the slightest difference, sir; it only aggravates the offence," went on Arthur, seeing that the habit of *scolding*, which he had learnt as tutor, proctor, and schoolmaster, was for once doing him good service; and therefore scolding on with all the vagueness of a Swiveller, and the heartiness of a Doll Tearsheet—"I am happy to hear that he *is* dead. It was the best thing he could do under the circumstances. And I respect him for it. If he could see you in your present degraded position, it would bring down his grey hairs in sorrow to the grave, which you will ultimately succeed in doing."

The last fearful bathos nearly made Arthur laugh, but made him get his wits about him again. The Italian said, utterly puzzled and abroad—

“What is it that Monsieur desires?”

“I have told you, sir;—that you go away from here; that you disappear from the presence of all honest men. Do you see that sentry there?” he added, pointing to the nearest. “Shall I call to him, and tell him the story of Kriegsturm and Silcote?”

“*Mais! M’sieu,*” hissed the Roman, seizing his hand, and kissing it, “I am very young. I am too young to die!”

“Too old to live, boy. Repent, boy! I spare your youth, and will not denounce you. Go back to the assassin Kriegsturm, and tell him that this night he is denounced to both the Austrian and Italian Governments; that all his miserable plots are discovered; and that you are the last of his emissaries that I will spare. He knows *me*. Tell him that Arthur Silcote said so.”

The young Roman vanished from under the lime-trees, and was seen no more for the present, and Arthur stood scratching his head.

“I doubt,” he soliloquised, “that I have been lying a little. I will put that consideration off to a more convenient opportunity. But Carlyle is right about his ‘preternatural suspicion.’ If that boy had not been bred in an atmosphere of suspicion, I never could have done anything with him by loud, self-asserting scolding. One of my St. Mary’s boys would have laughed at me. I could not have done anything with that boy if his conscience had not been bad. Well, I have got rid of him, though I talked sad nonsense, as far as I can remember, and—Heaven help me!—I doubt, lied. Yet the proctorial art is a great one: given the position, and if judiciously exercised. Bankruptcy commissioners, police-magistrates, and University officials are the only people who are left to keep alive the great art of scolding; schoolmasters have to be civil in these days of competition, lest their schools should get empty—as some parsons must preach pleasant things for the sake of their pew-rents.—Hallo! Boginsky! I have packed off our Roman assassin over the Marches.”

“How, then?”

“I proctorized him.”

“What does that mean?”

“Scolded him till he did not know whether he stood on his head or his heels. Put out all my strong points against him, while he was condemned to silence.”

"As the priest does in the sermon?" said Boginsky.

"*Exactly*," said Arthur. "In the slang of my University, I call that proctorizing, and think it a very good thing too. You surely can stand to hear the law laid down *once* a week, however feebly. You have six days left for interpellations. But have you been much in Prussia?"

"Why?"

"An idle thought, not worth pursuing. An *English* University proctor can be very exasperating; I was considering what a *Prussian* proctor would be like. I doubt he would be a Tartar. Well, now for the war. By the bye, I shall have to fight a duel with you."

"On what grounds?"

"My brother fights with the Austrians."

"*N'importe*. They will be beaten," said Boginsky, "and we will be gentle with them."

"Democracy allied with the Second of December!" said Arthur; "you are a nice lot. I shall proctorize some of *you*."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE PLENIPOTENTIARY ARRIVES AT TURIN.

As they four drove into the courtyard of their inn at Turin, in their roomy hired carriage, they saw a reeking horse having his saddle taken off, and a tall black whiskered gentleman in a large cap, who talked consequentially with the landlord.

"Hallo!" said Arthur. "Here is some one travelling in the old style. There will be a swell arrival directly. I hope they have not taken the whole house."

"By no means," the landlord assured them. "It was the English plenipotentiary, travelling towards Alessandria, with the ready-signed preliminaries of peace."

"Wonder he don't go by rail if he is in a hurry. They will all have cut one another's throats before he gets there," remarked Arthur.

They were shown into a nice *salon* adjoining the suite of apartments taken by the plenipotentiary, only separated from theirs by folding-doors, which the landlord pointed out were locked on *their* side.

"I doubt we shall hear every word they say," remarked Arthur. "If we do hear any secrets of State, I shall unlock the door and announce myself. It is a great shame of the landlord putting us here."

"They will hear all *we* say also," remarked James; "and we by talking loud ourselves can give them to understand that others are within hearing. If they can hear us, they will of course at once conclude that we can hear them."

"I don't know *that*," said Arthur. "I have had such great experiences of human stupidity as an examiner, that I very much doubt it. If this man is an English diplomatist, I fear that the mental process will be too elaborate for him."

They were seated merrily at dinner, when a rumbling in the courtyard announced the arrival. Almost immediately after the door of the next room was thrown open, and the great man entered,—English certainly, but not a courteous diplomatist by any means, and apparently with few preliminaries of peace about him.

At the first sound of his voice Boginsky said, "Now we will talk louder, then;" but looking at his three companions, he saw that his three companions had laid down their knives and forks, and were looking at one another in blank astonishment.

A loud and familiar voice on the other side of the door thundered out,—

"I don't care. I repeat what I said to the fellow to his face. The whole business is the most preposterous clamjamfry of unutterable nonsense which ever was seen on the face of this earth; and my remedy for it would be to hang the two emperors and the king up in a row."

"But you *didn't* say that to the man, you know," said a bright woman's voice. "You were as mild as milk with him, and only began to rage as soon as his back was turned."

James jumped to his feet.

"I don't care whether I said it or not," said Silcote. "I mean it. And, since you twit me with it, I will go to his hotel after dinner and say it. Now!"

"Remember that you are abroad, Silcote, and be cautious," said the woman's voice.

"I am not likely to forget that I am abroad, my dear soul; the fleas keep me in mind of that; and, as for my caution, why you yourself allow that I did *not* utter the treason of which you disapprove, after all; and for your kind sake I will not."

"Why, that is my father," said Arthur, amazed. "Who on earth is the woman with them?"

"My mother," said James, radiant with smiles.

Arthur grew suddenly sick and faint. He filled out a tumbler full of wine, and drank it off, and muttered half aloud,—

"Mrs. Sugden! O Heaven, why did I ever leave him alone! And so soon after poor Algy's death too! It is horrible. O God, forgive me my selfish neglect; forgive me my share in this miserable business."

Boginsky whispered to Arthur, "I fear we are in a more delicate situation than that of overhearing a diplomat speaking with his secretaries. From the petulance of both Monsieur and Madame towards one another, I should guess that they were just married, and in their wedding tour. Shall I strike up the Marseillaise? We must do something."

"Pray be silent for a moment," said Arthur. "See, here is another lady with them. I am going mad, and must be taken home straight and put in Bedlam."

For a third voice struck in here—a very pretty voice indeed; but—well, a little too fine-ladyish, the thing just a *very* little overdone. That voice said,—

"So you two are quarrelling again? The very moment I leave you two together you begin at it. What is the matter *now*?"

Arthur sat down again. "It was very like too," he said to Boginsky. "I fear my nerves are not what they should be yet." And Boginsky politely agreed with him.

"Our quarrels don't come to much do they, old girl?" said Silcote, and Mrs. Sugden laughed.

James by this time was at the door with his hand on the key. Arthur gently put him aside, threw the door open, and found himself face to face with Miss Lee, in all the full majesty of her unequalled beauty. The meeting was a little more astonishing for her than for him, for he had thought of her when he heard her voice three minutes before. And in her utter surprise, in a second of time, there passed across her face a sudden expression; a little parting of the lips, a little brightening of the eyes; which told him all he cared to know. She was her very ladylike self in one moment, although the twitch of her hands towards him when she saw him had caused her to drop her hundred-guinea travelling-bag, and made a *contretemps*. He knew all that he wanted to know in this world, and merely saying to her pleasantly, "How d'ye do! How d'ye do!" passed on with outstretched hands towards his father, seeing by a mere look at the three faces that there were somehow or other brighter and better times in the house of Silcote than there had been for forty years. "If he *has*

married Mrs. Sugden," he thought, "he might have done worse."

Silcote was very much changed, as Arthur saw in one moment. He looked so much younger, and so much more gentle. There was certainly an uncommon change in him.

"My dear father," he said, "this is a strange meeting."

"Very strange indeed, Archy," said Silcote. "I gave myself up frankly and freely to these two ladies to do what they would with me. They have done nothing but plot and conspire against me throughout the whole journey. I declare solemnly that I have never had my own way for one moment since we left Silcotes, and that their standing case against me is obstinacy. Now here they have laid their plans so well, that my own favourite son, whom I believed to be at Boppart, comes bursting in on me, with two of my grandsons, and a foreign gentlemen, out of my own bedroom."

"That is not your bedroom, sir," said Arthur, hardly knowing how to begin explanations.

"Is it not? Well, I give up the point. I thought it was. I am still inclined to think it is, because I observe you have been dining in it. However, I have no opinion. These two women have cured me of all that. Now go and kiss your sister-in-law, for she has finished kissing her boy James."

"My sister-in-law."

"Ah! Tom's wife, you know."

"I don't know, sir," said Arthur.

"Don't you?" said Silcote. "It don't matter. Some of them will tell you all about it some day. They are going to the milliner's to-morrow to get some new things to go to the war with: perhaps they will tell you all about it the day after."

"I daresay you wonder to find me in company with James and Reginald, sir," said Arthur, trying if he could get him to talk that way.

"Not I," said Silcote. "I am a perfectly resigned man. If you had been kicking against all sorts of pricks for forty years, you would find it uncommonly pleasant to get into that frame of mind. Bless you, the religionists have flourished on that secret for centuries."

"What secret, sir?"

"The secret of taking a man away from himself, and giving him peace in that way. Some of them have done it more or less viciously and artificially. These two good women have done it for me as well as any priest that ever was born. They have brought me back to the communion, a thing you never did. What fools you men-priests are! Not one of you seems to have

the sense to see that in a perfect state the priests would be all *women*. You men-priests would be in a queer way without them; they are designed and made for the priesthood. They have quite enough intellect for the office without having too much. And a highly intellectual priest is a mistake; like yourself. And the women have faith, which more than three-quarters of you men-priests have not."

Arthur was shocked. Yet his father's argument puzzled him somewhat. He as a priest had been a failure, and knew it. His father's argument, slightly developed, seemed to him to mean an extreme form of Romanism. Well, even the present state of his father was better than his old one. He changed the subject.

"My dear father, I will wait for explanations about, for instance, my new-found sister-in-law. But allow me to ask, just to start the conversation in a new channel, what on earth you are doing here?"

"My boy, let me first tell you how profoundly I am pleased by meeting you again. I do not want to talk business to-day, and any explanations you may want you may get from Miss Lee."

"Ah!" thought Arthur, "so I will. But, sir, you have not told me what brings you here."

"Well, a variety of matters. The one which is foremost in my mind just now is to get hold of my sister, your aunt, and get reconciled with her and bring her to reason, for I fear she is going on badly."

"How so?" asked Arthur.

"From a frantic letter she has written to me, I fear that she is in the hands of scoundrels, and well-nigh desperate. Kriegsthum, her old courier, major-domo, go-between in all her idiotic schemings and plottings and follies, has got hold of her again, and he and Tom have drained her of all her money, and made her desperate, I doubt. My original object was a very different one: it may be carried out, and it may not. I wished to right the memory of my first wife. Whether I shall do so or not I cannot say. My first object now is to save my poor sister; it is quite possible that in doing the one thing I may do the other."

"I do not quite understand, sir."

"No, I suppose not," said Silcote gently. "I fear I have been a sad fool, and wasted a life. My dear Archy, I have one favour to ask you. Do not in any way mention to me at present a death which has recently taken place in our family. I am very sorry, but I cannot speak of it."

"I am loth to speak of it myself, sir," said Arthur.

"I see Reginald is in mourning," said Silcote. "How did he bear it?"

"He cried," said Arthur, "once when he heard of it, and once afterwards, James tells me, in the night for a short time."

"I scarcely did more myself, if as much. Remorse does not produce tears. Let us leave the subject."

"About my aunt, sir. What makes you think she is in these straits? Has she appealed to you?"

"Not at all. *Her* letter was only one in which she confessed a recent wrong towards me, prayed my forgiveness and took farewell of me for ever. I should like to catch her at it," Silcote went on suddenly, and with energy. "I have had the bullying of her for forty years, and does she think I am going to give it up now! These two new ones," he continued, winking at Arthur, "won't stand it. You remember *that* for your soul's health and comfort."

"I will, sir," said Arthur solemnly. "You have had another letter about her, then?"

"Yes," said Silcote, "I have had a letter of nine closely-written pages; a letter which, following me to the continent, has cost me about nine shillings—from that cantankerous old busy-body, Miss Raylock. She is dragging her old bones after Tom and your aunt to the war, and has got into your aunt's confidence. I am bound to say that she has written me a most kind, sensible, and womanly letter, on which I am going to act."

"She is capable of doing nothing else, sir."

"That woman has made thousands out of us, with her confounded novels. She has no powers of invention. She put *me* as the principal character in her first successful novel, and made her fortune. She has spent all her money in fancy cucumbers and geraniums, and now she is hunting my sister, for the mere purpose, I am perfectly certain, of putting her as leading character in a novel, and going to her grave with an extra thousand pounds in the Three per Cents. But she will be deceived."

"My aunt the Princess would make a good central figure in a novel, sir."

"No, sir," said the old man, shaking his head; "her folly is too incongruous; the ruck of commonplace fools who read novels will not have sufficient brains to appreciate the transcendental genius of *her* folly. Raylock will make a mess of her. She will be trying to find out motives for her conduct; and my sister hasn't got any."

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE PRELIMINARIES TO THE TREATY OF TURIN.

"Now then, Mrs. Tom," cried Silcote, after a long talk with Arthur, "dinner is ready. I can't live by talking nonsense to curly-headed youngsters, if you can. Arthur, take in Mrs. Tom."

"They have had their dinner, these people," said Mrs. Silcote, "and don't want any more. As for talking nonsense to curly-headed youngsters, you have been talking long enough with Mr. Arthur, and nonsense enough too, I don't doubt."

"That's a specimen," said Silcote, pointing with his finger at the radiantly happy, good-humoured, and kindly face of Mrs. Silcote,—“that is a specimen of the way they treat me. Go and take her arm, and take her in to dinner. When I was your age, I could eat two dinners. Miss Lee, your arm.”

Arthur, who as yet knew practically nothing, went up to the woman whom his father had introduced to him as his sister-in-law: when he looked at her he said *sotto voce*, "By Jove!" She was probably the most remarkable woman he had ever seen. Tall, as tall as he, with grey hair, and a very beautiful face, handsomely dressed, with every fold of gown or shawl in its right place, standing very calmly in a splendid attitude, and looking him through and through with her great calm grey eyes. As he went up to her, it suddenly struck him as quite a new idea that this was James's mother, Mrs. Sugden, the woman who lived in the little white cottage at the edge of Boisey Hill. How she came to be his sister-in-law he did not inquire. His father was not likely to be wrong in a matter like this: that was the henceop in which he clung in this wide weltering ocean of astonishment.

He took her in to dinner, and sat between her and Miss Lee. But this wonderful Sugden-Tom-Silcote woman occupied his whole attention. "Heaven save me from Bedlam!" he said; "this is the woman who used to plant beans in a smock frock. This is the wife of the man that helped to fight the poachers on the very night that James was brought in wounded. Hang it, I can't remember it all."

He remembered, however, that on one occasion, the curate being absent, he had undertaken the cure of the parish, just as he would have undertaken the siege of Sebastopol. And that at that time he had given this terrible lady in grey silk and white lace spiritual consolation, such as he had, and a shilling.

"Bless our family," he thought; "we shall fill Bedlam if we

increase. Are you going to say anything to me?" he said suddenly to Mrs. Thomas.

"Why?" said she, calmly.

"Because I thought you were not," said Arthur.

"What shall I say to you?" said she, with perfect good humour.

"Explain matters, that is all; like a good soul as you look. My father's reticence is so exasperating."

Mrs. Thomas explained everything to him from beginning to end, while Miss Lee ate her dinner, drank her wine, folded her napkin, and put it through the ring: went on explaining, while she rose after having only interchanged a few commonplaces with Arthur, and left the room: went on still explaining until Miss Lee returned *tremendously* dressed, as far as extravagance went, but with wonderful quietness and good taste, with her bonnet on, ready for a promenade. The two boys had gone before, to see some regiments march out.

"I am going on the Boulevards," she said, in a cool and lofty manner. "You people want to stay and talk family matters, which are no concern of mine, and which bore me. The courier said there are three more regiments to march to-night; I hear a band playing, which must belong to one of them. I shall go and see them off."

"Are you going alone, my dear?" said Mrs. Thomas.

"Alone? Certainly. I am used to take care of myself, and perfectly able to do so." And with her splendid chin in the air, she certainly looked as if she was. There is no one more safe from insult than an imperially proud and handsome woman. Cads scarcely dare to look at her in the face, and the worse than cads know from their experience that the most they will get is furious scorn. No one knew this better than Miss Lee. She would have marched up coolly to the finest knot of dandies in Europe, and asked one of them to call her a cab; and have driven calmly off in it, with a cold bow of thanks.

"But the officers, cousin," once more interpellated Mrs. Tom.

"I shall probably try to get into conversation with some of them," said Miss Lee, with her bonnet-strings half concealing her beautiful proud chin in the air, "and consult them about the best way of getting as near the fight as possible. The King very likely does not go until to-morrow, and will probably review one of these regiments as they go; so I shall have a chance of seeing your fat hero. Well, good-bye. I shall be at home by dark, or soon after." And so she went.

Arthur still sat as if he had not heard her speak, sat for five minutes, and then rose and left the room.

Mrs. Thomas was a little indignant. "She gave him time and place in the most obvious manner," she said. "I never saw the thing done more openly in my life."

"I thought she wrapped it up pretty well," said Silcote.

"*You* thought," said Mrs. Thomas. "A deal you know about it. The way she did it was next thing to brazen."

"I hope he knows where to find her," said Silcote, drinking a glass of wine. "I'll be hanged if I should."

"It's lucky that your son is not quite such a stupid," said Mrs. Thomas. "She, with her marching regiments, and the King reviewing them as they passed the palace! Why, there!" she continued, warming, "as sure as ever you sit gandering in that chair, I could go at this moment, on my bare feet, and lay my finger on that woman. She gave him time and place, I tell you, and I could lay my finger on her now."

"Could you indeed, my dear?" said Silcote. "I have no doubt you could. Still I think she wrapped it up pretty well. I know Turin, and she don't. I couldn't find her."

"I could," said Mrs. Tom; "I have only to go down into that street——"

"Without your shoes and stockings? You *said* you could find her barefooted."

"——and ask," said Mrs. Tom, scornfully disregarding him, "where the King was reviewing the soldiers. And I should get my answer, and there she'd be, and him with her. Don't tell me."

"I don't want to tell you. But surely this heat is unnecessary."

"Not at all," said Mrs. Tom. "She gave him time and place before my own eyes: and she was too bold—for him."

"It is all right, though, is it not?" said Silcote.

"Oh, it's all *right* enough," said Mrs. Tom. "But after the way he has served her, she had no business to give him time and place as she did. I wish it had been *me*." And she shook her head with deep meaning.

"Do you indeed? So you really wish that you had a chance at Archy? But you must reflect that you could not, under any circumstances, marry your brother-in-law; let me advise you to give up this newly-conceived passion for Arthur, and let him marry your cousin quickly. Two such dreadful tongues as yours and his would never have hit it off together, and more-over——"

"There," said Mrs. Tom, "one mustard seed of nonsense dropped in your way grows into a great tree of nonsense very soon. Do you know that you have to give an account of every idle word you speak? You run off into idle senseless *badinage* on the text of one single sentence or word. It is a silly habit."

"Yes, my dear," said Silcote. "As soon as you have done blowing me up, suppose we go and see the soldiers?"

She kissed him, and said, "You are a good old man. I don't know how you ever got on without me."

"Very badly," said Silcote. "Come, let us jog out together, and see this King and these soldiers, you and me."

And so this queer couple jogged out together to gape and stare, like a couple of children, at the soldiers, the King, and everything else abnormal which came in their way. The courteous Italian crowd which made way for the strange pair only admired their *bizarre* beauty. Not one in the crowd dreamt that the life of a son and a husband was at stake, in that terrible hurly-burly so soon to begin to the east. And indeed they did not realize it themselves, any more than they realised how deeply they loved him; both believing that their love for him had been killed by his misconduct. Poor fools!

CHAPTER L.

THE KING COMES OUT TO MARSHAL THEM.

THEY were singing in the streets of Turin that afternoon. Groups of them were singing war ballads, love ballads. Nay, not only were arm-in-arm groups singing of war, love, loyalty, of everything save law and divinity; but even solitary walkers piped up, quite unnoticed. Therefore why should not Arthur, with a good voice, not untrained by chorus-masters, pipe up too? He did so, however. A spectacle and scandal amongst tutors and ex-proctors, had they only heard him; which they did not. An ex-tutor, singing out, clear and loud, in the streets of a foreign city, was a thing which no one was prepared for in 1859, and, to tell the truth, is scarcely prepared for now; yet he did, this Balliol man, at the top of his very excellent voice.

"I know the way she went
Past with her maiden posy,
For her feet have touched the meadows,
And have left the daisies rosy."

The street was extremely crowded, but every one was nearly mad with good humour; and Arthur's handsome face was so radiant, that innumerable people greeted him. "A glorious day for Italy, milord," said one. "Very much so indeed," replied Arthur. "We have the sympathies of England, if not her arms, on our side, sir," said another. "Our sympathies are in Italy while our arms are in Hindostan," replied Arthur; which was thought to be wonderfully neat, and was bandied about: for it did not take much to please them *that* day. "Confound it," thought Arthur, "I am being too agreeable; I know I shall get myself kissed directly, and I hate it. But I can't help it."

All this time Miss Lee was sailing on before him, with her veil up, calmly, imperial, looking every one straight in the face, and speaking to any one who spoke to her. She attracted universal and respectful attention. Arthur was proud of her.

The great rendezvous was in the Grand Place. Along the street in which they were came a regiment of blue-coated, steel helmeted, grey-trousered cavalry to join it. The enormously high-piled ornate houses were hung with green, white, and red tri-colours from paving to coping-stone, and the windows were thronged with frantic patriots, as were also the streets. It was a splendid and exciting sight; and, as they all went rushing along the narrow street in the rear of the regiment, Arthur's long, dark days of sickness and loss of hope seemed indefinitely removed.

At last they came to the place of the spectacle. *Their* regiment was the last. Three regiments of cavalry and four of infantry were already drawn up; and, there was the big-chested King himself; and there was Cavour, and there were Generals La Marmora, Fanti, Cialdini—men whose names sound like the ringing of silver bells. Their regiment formed in, and the burly King began to move. Arthur perceived that Miss Lee had got an uncommonly good place, and then found himself face to face with Boginsky.

"A glorious day for Italy," said Boginsky.

"It threatens thunder!" said Arthur.

"And lightning," said Boginsky, who was in company with several "reds."

"How epigrammatic we all are!" said Arthur. "I myself have said the neatest thing to-day I have said for years. Why, this excitement would sharpen the wits of a mere horse," he continued artfully.

"Of a mere stupid horse, indeed," replied the innocent Boginsky.

"Sharpen his wits so much that he lets the man get on his back. And now they both go away together to kill the stag. Will the man get off when the stag is dead, do you think?"

"The Emperor would never dare——," began Boginsky.

"Never for a moment," said Arthur; "no one ever dreamt that he would. He is at Genoa now, because he did not dare to keep away. He wants no more black cricket-balls studded with gun nipples, and percussion caps on them. I was not thinking of him."

Said Boginsky, "You puzzle me."

Arthur folded his arms, caught Boginsky's eye, and then looked steadily at the King of Sardinia, who was now within six yards of them. He took off his hat to the King; and as he went past Boginsky towards Miss Lee, he looked into that gentleman's face with a strong stare, which meant volumes. As he went he heard Boginsky gasp out,—

"He had *better*."

Delighted with the purely gratuitous mischief which he had made, Arthur got to the side of Miss Lee just as the King had caught sight of her. There was no doubt whatever of his Majesty's admiration, about which Miss Lee cared just absolutely nothing at all. She wanted a real good stare at the King, and she got one. If he liked the looks of her it showed his good taste; in the perfect boldness of her perfect innocence it was perfectly indifferent whether he looked at her or not. *She* wanted to look at him, and the more he looked the more she saw.

Arthur, proudly laughing in his heart, whispered to her, "Take my arm," and she put her hand upon it. In one moment more, unseen of any one, his hand was upon hers, as it lay upon his arm, and their two hands were tightly locked together. Not a word was spoken; what need for words, clumsy words, when their two hands told their tale so truly?

Silcote with Mrs. Tom went gandering about, staring at the soldiers and the shops, and enjoying themselves thoroughly. Silcote bought a large white umbrella lined with green, which took his fancy, and which he used as a pointer, to point out objects of interest to Mrs. Tom; among other things, pointing out the King when his Majesty was not four yards from the ferule.

At last they got home, and heard that Miss Lee was home before them. Mrs. Thomas went to seek her, and soon returned.

"It's all right," she said; "I knew it would be. There, you needn't throw your umbrella across the room like a lunatic; though Heaven knows, my dear, I am as glad as you are."

CHAPTER LI.

THE DESERTION OF THE BOYS.

"LET me introduce my friend and travelling companion, Count Boginsky," said Arthur to his father.

"I am delighted to know you, sir," said Silcote, frankly and pleasantly. "I hear from Arthur that you are actually good enough to come to the war with us as *cicerone*. It is a piece of good luck on which we could not possibly have reckoned."

"Nor I either," said Boginsky. "I shall really believe that times are going to change for the better with me."

"They are, sir, they are," said the Squire. "Believe it, sir, that these great concussions shake things into their places. We are going to see a very great thing, sir. I begin to imagine, a very great thing indeed. I am sorry for poor Austria, for I tell you honestly that, with all her political folly, I have a sneaking kindness for Austria. But the world will gain."

"Then you are perfectly sure that Austria is to be beaten?"

"In the nature of things. Do *you* doubt? Her cause is not just."

"She fights well, however," said Boginsky, "and her cause is as just now as it was in '49, when she won. I think it is a very doubtful business indeed, sir."

"And Italy!" said Silcote, interested.

"Italia is not yet," said Boginsky; "she may be next month, next year, fifty years hence; but she is not yet. We go to see the dice thrown for her."

"I should like to have seen a red-coated regiment or two in the hurly-burly," said the Squire. "Merely on sentimental grounds."

"One would have liked to see the red-coats also, we democrats," said Boginsky, "but it is not expected of England. England has accepted Democracy as the breath of her nostrils only in a modified form as yet, but the sacred spirit will show itself perfect. England's mission is to disseminate democracy in new lands; with regard to the old ones, we dispense with her. It is I, and such as I, who carry the fiery cross over the land. We are contented with her, and we love her, if she will fulfil her special mission of carrying it by sea."

"Do you know," said the Squire, "that this is interesting? But it is sad nonsense, I doubt, Arthur; is it not?"

"No," said Arthur.

"Then give us some more of it," said the Squire to Boginsky. "He is my spiritual director, you know. I spent a couple of thousand pounds on his education to fit him for the post. If he approves of it, give us some more. To help you,—What do you think of the fat man?"

"Cavour?"

"Heavens, no! Don't talk any nonsense about *him*. The stout man on the grey horse."

"He will be King of Italy; and I object to kings as a rule. Do you know, sir, that I must change the conversation, for the mere purpose of delivering myself of a mission which should have been executed before?"

"You look grave. Is anything wrong?"

"I think that nothing is wrong," said Boginsky. "But that very much depends on how you will take it. Have you seen your grandson, Reginald, since last night?"

"No. At my time of life I have given up all idea of being treated with proper respect by boys. I had concluded that he and his cousin James had gone for an expedition into the country, to get out of my way."

"I pointed out to your grandson, and to James Sugden, that they were not behaving well, but I could make no impression on them whatever. Mr. Sugden was spokesman, and gave me my commission to Mr. Arthur. He said that they were exceedingly sorry to cause any annoyance, but that they had made up their minds, and, to save words, had done it secretly, because they knew that James's mother (the beautiful grey-haired lady, I believe) and the Squire would have objected to it, and would not have permitted it for a moment."

"What have the two young fools done now, then, in the name of confusion?" demanded the Squire.

"They requested me to point out the fact," continued Boginsky, unheeding him, but going through his commission, "that women would be in the way, and that they were determined to see it; and also that they had plenty of money for the present, and that, when it ran short, they would send to you for more."

"This story begins to hold together," said the Squire; "I can quite understand this part of it. No doubt they will. But what have they done?"

"Then, as a last resource, having used all my own arguments, I appealed to the Colonel himself. I pointed out to him that Reginald was risking your good favour by taking such a step, and that James Sugden's mother had only just arrived from England. He laughed at me. He said that it was good for them, and took

them away. I never yet got the best of my friend Frangipanni."

"Frangipanni!" exclaimed the Squire. "What on earth has he been doing with my boys? What is this?"

"Count Frangipanni is colonel of the 18th regiment of the Sardinian light horse, which marched last night.* Reginald Silcote and James Sugden were his two favourite pupils in his Italian class at St. Mary's Hospital. He has seduced them away with him to go and make sketches of the war, and has promised to take them under fire; which he probably will do; as he is one of the bravest men in Europe, and as they would follow him down the crater of Vesuvius."

"This is very pleasant, Arthur," said Silcote. "This is thoroughly pleasant."

"Lucky young dogs," said Arthur: "they promised to stick by me. I would go after them if I could get franked by a colonel."

"They will be killed," said the Squire.

"Most likely," said Arthur. "But they will have taken some bad sketches first, which we shall find on their corpses."

"How shall we break it to Mrs. Tom?" said the Squire.

"Tell her all about it the next time she comes into the room," replied Arthur; "I should say that was the best way. If you are afraid, let me."

"It will be a terrible shock to her," said the Squire.

"She has been under fire herself in the Crimea more than once," said Arthur. "She will not care much. They might have taken me with them, I think. Here she is. Mrs. Tom, James has bolted to the front, and is going under fire. Hallo, what is this?"

"Only my old dress as field-nurse in the Crimea," she said quietly. "I found out why he was gone, and I got ready to go after him. I should suggest marching myself, if we are to see anything at all. The last regiment goes to-morrow; and, as far as I can gather from the soldiers, the causeways are narrow, and our carriages will get hampered among commissariat waggons if we delay. I should have proposed marching in the rear of Frangipanni's regiment, if I had known that the boys were to give us the slip. We had better order the carriages at eight to-morrow morning."

* Not to deprive brave men of their glory, even for a moment, in a work of fiction, it is necessary to say that the men of Genestrello were the regiment at Montferrat (with some squadrons of other regiments) under command of General Sonnaz.

From this time she and Boginsky took the lead. She dressed in grey with a modest hood, looking so much like some sort of *sœur de charité*, that she got the route everywhere, and carried her train with her. Miss Lee carried her silks and satins through the scenes which came afterwards, attended by Arthur, who kept the dress of an English parson.

CHAPTER LII.

THE FAMILY BEGINS TO DRAW TOGETHER.

WHETHER it was the fault of Count Frangipanni, or of James, that the latter took the extraordinary step of running away from the newly-united party, is one of those things which it is hardly necessary to make clear. Whichever of them originated the idea, it was soon acted on. There is one thing certain—that the Count took the most elaborate pains to point out to James that if he stayed with the carriages he would see absolutely nothing. James did not want much encouraging. “If we argue and ask leave, Reginald,” he said, “we shall never have leave to go. Let us bolt.”

“Certainly,” said Reginald. And so they commissioned Boginsky, whom they met in the crowd, to arrange matters for them in the best way he could.

When they commissioned him to say that they had money enough for the present, they spoke the truth. Their money, however, looked a great deal smaller after they had bought a couple of little horses. But, as James said, they were going with the winning army, and would make requisitions on the conquered territory. Besides, they had their watches, and at least ten pounds a-piece. A real schoolboy will go into any adventure with a pound in his pocket.

Boginsky might have supplemented his commission from them to Arthur, by mentioning that he had bought their horses and saddles for them, getting these articles for them, by means of his democratic connexion, at about half the price they could have got them for themselves; moreover, that he had spent the evening of the previous day in getting away their painting tackle, money, and clothes, and conveying them to the little café at which they were rebelliously lodging. He suppressed these latter facts entirely.

The fact is that he would have liked to go himself, but felt bound in honour to stay by Arthur. And, indeed, with his political character, he was much safer in the rear than in the front; so, under the *civis Romanus ægis*, he travelled in Silcote's barouche.

The boys were pleased at their escapade. The troopers liked them, and they liked the troopers. England, said the Italians, the free country of Europe, sympathized with the cause, although political complications elsewhere happened to prevent her assisting in it, as *they* had assisted in the Crimea. Yet she had sent her best blood (according to Frangipanni) to look on, even if they could not fight. They were in perfect good-humour with the English, these troopers, and considered James in the light of a political demonstration. To him personally they were devoted, like every one else;—"the only agreeable person which your family has ever produced," said Miss Raylock of him afterwards to the assembled Silcotes.

They went on under the bright May weather, fast and far, through pleasant ways across the lower slopes of the Apennines. But few people were about, and those got fewer as they went on. Our two friends could make little or nothing of the plans of the campaign, and indeed cared little whether the Austrians would test the right or the left of their position; all they cared about were the incidents.

They had a very pleasant incident one warm May day. Traveling over nearly plain open meadows, planted here and there with mulberries, keeping the green, abrupt hills on their right, they came to a stream by a village, and by this stream lay a battalion of French soldiers, some of whose officers came and fraternized, but the body of which lay and sat still. The stream in which these two audacious youths watered their horses was the Fossagazzo, the village was Genestrello. The French battalion which lay on the grass was a battalion of the 74th, under General Cambriels; but little they knew or cared about these details. The two simple-minded youths were at the extreme breaking-point of a great wave, the foremost wave of a sea which was to burst over, and regenerate, nay make, a kingdom; but they were utterly unconscious of it. The place was picturesque, and the day warm. Further on the scenery seemed to promise better. They rode in advance of the troops along the broad dusty road, and turned off into a hedgeless field on the left, lay down on the grass, and, letting their tired horses graze, took their dinner of sausage, bread and wine.

Then they began sketching. The field was wide and open, with here and there a tree. Before, and close to them, was the broad

and dusty highway, separated from them by a little ditch and a few shaped stones at regular intervals. Beyond, but close to them, was a handsome collection of Italian buildings; a church notably; an inn; a larger building than either of these, probably a country gentleman's house; all noble-looking, of yellow stone, with red roofs and dormer windows; behind all a wooded hill. It was a place which the idlest tourist would like to sketch, with or without an incident. They were lucky enough to see a remarkable incident, but were too much scared to introduce it into their landscape.

Their friends were well in sight on their right, and it was dinner-time with them as with James and Reginald; yet their friends were taking no dinner whatever. Their friends the Sardinian cavalry were on the move again, and soon passed them along the road at a foot pace.

"Shall we go with them?" said Reginald.

"We can catch them up," said James. "We will finish our sketches."

And so they finished them.

It was late when they had finished them, and they wanted their supper. They bethought them of going over to the group of houses which they had been sketching, on the other side of the road. One of these they found was a rather good inn, the landlord of which was perfectly willing to receive them. He remarked to them,—

"Live men to-day, dead men to-morrow. An inn to-day, a hospital the day after. Come in, gentlemen, but pay beforehand; the dead do not pay as a rule."

They acquiesced in his demand of payment beforehand, and satisfied him. Then they had their supper, and discussed whether it was worth while or not to follow Frangipanni and his light horse so late. They could easily follow him in the morning, they agreed, and the quarters were good. So they stayed, and went out in front of the inn to smoke.

The jollity of their march seemed to have departed. None of the officers from the battalion of French which was lying so close to them were swarming in and out of the inn, as is their custom. There was none of that brisk, merry, good-humoured babble between officers, men, and civilians which makes the arrival of a French regiment so agreeable. The officers seemed all to be lying down by the brook with their men to-night, thinking of quite other things than absinthe and dominoes. Our friends began to get sorry that they had not gone on with Frangipanni's light horse.

Only one French officer was in front of the inn when they sauntered out to smoke,—a thickset man, with a grey moustache

and shaven cheeks, with the scarlet side of his cloak turned outside, and much gold about him, who also walked up and down smoking. "Evidently," said James, "a swell: the very man to consult." If he had known that it was General Forey it would not have made much difference; for, if he had ever known, he had completely forgotten, what General Forey had done, or had left undone. How many of my readers remember?

James, cap in hand, and schoolboy French in his mouth, went up to General Forey, and confided to him that they, two young English artists, were travelling with Frangipanni's light horse, and had got left behind. The General, also cap in hand, told him politely that if he remained where he was he would be extremely likely to meet his friends, Messieurs of the Sardinian light horse, once more; and so bowed himself politely out of the audience.

They saw soon afterwards that he was joined by two staff-officers, that his orderly brought his horse from the stable, and that he rode sharply off, in the direction by which they had come.

They lay in the field in front of the house till it was late, and then went to bed and slept quite quietly. Their Italian was but poor, such as they had got from Frangipanni at school, or they might have learnt much. In the morning, trusting to the French General's opinion that their friends would return by the same route, they quietly had their breakfast, went across the road, and lay in the shade of a mulberry-tree, smoking, and touching up their sketches.

There was the broad and dusty road, divided from the field by shaped stones; beyond, the yellow-and-red pile of buildings, one of which was their inn; beyond, the pleasant wooded hill; to the left, heights crowned with important-looking buildings. And now came their incident.

In a cloud of dust their friends of the Sardinian light horse came along the highway at a slinging trot the way they had gone, fulfilling General Forey's prediction. Our youths knew nearly every face in the regiment, and a merrier set of fellows they had never seen; yet every face was grave enough now. The last man who passed them was Frangipanni, bringing up the rear. The regiment passed them about three hundred yards, and then, at a few notes of the bugle, wheeled each man in his own ground, and was at once formed in column of squadrons on the road: Frangipanni, having wheeled with them, standing sole and solitary at their head.

For a few minutes there was silence. The Sardinian light horse had scarcely settled themselves in their places when the silence

was broken. James and Reginald were still innocently looking at their old friends, drawn up across the road, and trying to make out the faces of the officers who were most familiar to them, when they were startled by the infinitely inharmonious, yet deeply terrible, crashing, trampling, and clanking of another regiment of cavalry, approaching along the high road from their left.

Reginald saw them first, for James was staring at Frangipanni. "Here is another regiment," said Reginald, "all in white. These will be the French."

James looked round once, and shook him fiercely by the shoulder. "Get up!" he said, "here are the Austrians upon us, and we are in the thick of the whole thing."

"The who?" said Reginald.

"The *Austrians*, you ass," said James. "Get up, will you! Who in heaven or earth would ever have thought of this? Run, scud, get out of the way, get on your legs at any rate, and, if we get involved in it keep your arms above your head, and keep on your feet. Get hold of a stirrup if you can, but run with the horses, and get out of it as quick as you are able. By Jove, who would have thought of this?"

Reginald, though he scarcely understood what was coming, behaved very well. He ran with James some ten yards into the meadow, and then they both turned to look on war itself, as few have looked on it.

The Austrians halted. They knew that the French were there, and the French had got a terrible prestige since the Crimea, which they have maintained. The Austrian colonel halted his men for one instant, and rode forward towards the ravine alone before them all to see if the concealed French could be tempted into opening fire at him. He went within pistol-shot of Count Frangipanni; but the French knew the business of war, and he saw nothing but the Sardinian regiment of light horse.

"Look at that glorious Austrian colonel," said James. "There is a man who don't mind death. I wish to heaven that their cause was better. Watch that Austrian colonel. Did you ever see such a noble fellow in your life? See how he sits his horse; I confess that my principles would give way under the influence of such a man."

"I think I know him," said Reginald.

"What are they going to do?" said the excited James. "Viva Italia! By heavens, our fellows are going to charge!"

Who gave the order for the first charge at Genestrello, Tom Silcote or Aurelio Frangipanni? The result is the same. A thousand men on each side, mounted on horseback, with drawn

swords in their hands, in column of troops, rode fiercely at one another, trying to slay one another, happily with little effect. The first two troops on either side got themselves, to a certain extent, bruised, shaken, and cut about with swords; while the rearward troops drew rein, and did nothing until the bugle gave the word to the Italian cavalry to right about face, which they did accordingly.

Count Frangipanni and Colonel Silcote, however, seemed rather loth to part, for each had found in the other a good swordsman. For full half a minute, after the Italian retreat had sounded, these two were alone together, fencing cautiously and keenly, yet with apparently perfect good humour. Colonel Silcote was the first to rein his horse back, and say, "You must follow your men, Colonel. Your major, seeing you so busy, has sounded the retreat. Frangipanni saluted politely, smiled, and trotted off after his regiment, while the Austrians prepared to advance.

"Our fellows are beaten then?" said James, with an air of discontent. "I cannot see why; they seem to do quite as well as the others; but I suppose that the Major knows what he is about. Frangipanni gave no orders. There goes my Austrian colonel off at a sling trot after them. I hope he won't come to grief."

"Your Austrian colonel, you turncoat!" said Reginald.

"Yes, mine," said James, emphatically. "I like the look of that man. I would go to the devil after that man."

"He is one of the accursed Tedeschi," said Reginald. "What would our comrades say?"

"I don't know, and I don't care," replied James. "He is a much finer fellow than any of the Italians, except Frangipanni. He saved Frangipanni from being taken prisoner. I heard him give him the office to cheese it," went on James, reproducing, in his admiration, a very old London vulgarism. "That man is a noble gentleman, if he were fifty Tedeschi."

"So he is," said a voice, apparently from high up in the air. "You never said a truer word than that, James Sugden. Who ever dared to say that he was not? Do you remember the night when he carried you, a poor bruised and bleeding little hind, into Silcotes, away from the poachers, and made your fortune at the expense of his own?"

To turn and find our old friend, the Princess—sitting on a tall bay horse, in a blue riding-skirt, with a white bodice, a wideawake hat and cock's feathers, and a revolver at her right pommel—was a very small surprise. After having looked on, at twenty yards' distance, at a charge of cavalry, in which some eight were killed,

and some twelve left howling and moaning in the road, one is not inclined to be surprised at anything. James merely took off his hat, and said, "Madam, I scarcely hoped to have the pleasure of seeing you here." Reginald said nothing whatever, but stared at his aunt, openmouthed.

"I dare say not," she answered. "I am following Colonel Silcote's regiment. How did you come here?"

"We came with the Sardinian light horse, sketching, my lady."

"You might have been in better company," said the Princess. "Why did you not come on our side?"

"Our sympathies are Italian, my lady. Do I understand you that the colonel we saw just now was Colonel Silcote?"

"Did you not recognise him?"

"I do now. Reginald, you said that you thought you knew him. But I should scarcely have recognised my own father, in such a place, and in such a uniform."

"Are you here on foot? Where are your horses?"

"Across the road, my lady."

"You had better get them. Is there any force of French on this brook here, the Fossagazzo?"

"I decline to answer that question, my lady," said James. "Reginald, I hope you were not going to speak. Hold your tongue, sir. How dare you?"

"Well, I suppose you are right," said the Princess, good-humouredly. "Here comes Urban; we shall know soon. Hark! there is infantry there, and French infantry. You might have told me without doing any harm. They are in force, are they not? Is it Forey? Get your horses, you young simpletons, get your horses, and come back across the road to me again. Do not lose a moment."

They ran across and got out their horses and were back with her in less than five minutes, abandoning their heavy baggage; for there was a sound in their ears, familiar to us now, which they had never heard before.

It was rapid musketry firing. At first only crackling like the burning of the gorse on the hills above St. Mary's, but growing heavier every moment, until it roared out in heavy crashes, which shook the air even where they stood, and brought a few heavy drops of rain from the summer clouds which floated overhead. When they got back to her they found her in the same position, gazing intensely at the dip in the broad dusty road about a quarter of a mile to their right, from which came furious volleys of musketry, and a general raging confusion, which showed them

that they had pushed too far for safety, and were actually at the very point where the two armies would decide their first struggle.

The Princess was perfectly calm. "Tell me, James Sugden, as a gentleman to a lady, is Forey there?"

And James answered, "I believe he is, my lady."

"In force?"

"I decline."

"You are right. Well, with his present reputation, he will fight hard to regain his former one. You will take care of a poor old woman in case the poor Tedeschi are beaten back?"

"Madame, I am entirely at your service," said James.

"You will keep with me, then?"

"Certainly," said James.

"The Italians would murder me, and you are well *répandu* among them. Keep by me. I hold you on your honour as a gentleman."

"Here come the Austrians back again," exclaimed James.

And indeed the cavalry were returning along the road in some confusion, followed by their friends of the light horse. At the same moment, possibly the very first rifled cannon bullet ever fired in anger tore up the ground near the Princess, and covered her with dust.

"We may as well move a little further," she said; "this is too close to be pleasant."

It was a very reasonable suggestion; so they trotted along till they were fairly past the village of Genestrello, and then paused and looked about them.

Opposite to them were two abrupt, rounded, and partly wooded hills, about half a mile off, the one on their right crowned by a single large building with a campanile, the one to the left by a village with another campanile. A small hollow divided the two hills, and they saw that the French army, battalion after battalion, was already swarming up the right hand towards the solitary building, under a heavy fire from the solitary building, the summit of the hill, and the village on the other hill.

The firing got more fast and furious every moment. The right-hand hill was rapidly blackening with the swarming French, who were bringing up artillery; and far away some Sardinian cavalry were seen charging up the hill. The first hill seemed to be doomed, in which case there seemed but small chance for the second.

Genestrello was carried too, for the roar grew louder and nearer, and broken regiments began to pass them, from which men fell out, and sat down and began feebly and pitifully to try to

get at their wounds. It was certainly time to move, for the cannon-shot were ripping and crashing amongst the trees, and the summit of the first hill was a mere raging volcano. And which way were they to go, except away from the French?

As they went, they saw the village on the second hill carried: and lo, it was evening, and the day had passed like an hour. The battle of Montebello was over and won. Night was coming on, and the Austrians were in retreat. They had "felt" for the French and found them. Montebello showed pretty clearly which way the campaign was to go. If they were unable to hold such a position as that what would be the result elsewhere?

CHAPTER LIII.

JAMES AND HIS FATHER.

THE Princess cared little for Montebello. Her horror at Tom Silcote's going to the campaign had ended in her determining to go with him, and she had accompanied his regiment in the way we have seen; riding parallel with his regiment, with which she was quite familiar, and which she may be said to have joined; and seeing almost the very first blood drawn, and having witnessed the battle of Montebello from a quiet field, without being very dangerously under fire at all.

This would have been enough for the ambition of most amateur lady-soldiers, but she thought nothing of it. The day of Montebello was a triumph for her foolish soul, for she had succeeded in deluding James hopelessly across into the Austrian lines, and she considered that a great stroke of business.

The foolish plans which they had made against this young man have been discussed before. None of his enemies had the slightest idea about his real claims to be a dangerous person, with regard to the Silcotes succession, and its almost hopeless entanglement. He was looked on as the "dangerous horse," however; and she prided herself on her dexterity in tempting him into the Austrian lines. "We have him in our power now," she said to herself, scarcely knowing what she meant.

She could not dream, of course, that she was only in the way of introducing the boy to his own father. Let our story tell itself.

The Austrian left was withdrawn hastily that night towards the Sesia: there was great confusion. The Princess and our two friends rode together into Casteggio about eight o'clock; and there found ranged warlike order, with warlike disorder dribbling through it to the rear of it, to become orderly again.

Our friends had lost their Austrian regiment, and waited for it at Casteggio. It was in a sad plight. General Blanchard had brought up with him some of this infernal new artillery, and had played sad mischief with them. The regiment was passed on through Casteggio towards the rear, wearied, disheartened, and half cut to pieces. They thought for a time that Tom Silcote was not with them, but was killed; but last of all, bringing up the rear of his straggling and wearied squadrons, he came with a bloody face, bareheaded, holding his reins in his sword-hand, and his left arm hanging loosely beside him.

"He is hit," said the Princess. And they joined him.

"I have got a graze on my left arm from a French bullet," he said, cheerily, "not to mention a wipe over the head from that jolly old Italian colonel. I thought I was a swordsman till I met him."

"Wretch!" said the Princess; "after your saving his life this morning!"

"Not at all, Aunt. A jolly old cock, every inch of him. We only politely renewed our fencing match, and he only cut me over the head and apoloγised."

"What is the name of this Italian colonel of yours," asked the Princess of James, "who accepts his life in the morning, and tries to assassinate the man who saved him an hour afterwards?"

"Count Frangipanni," said James without comment.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed the Princess. "How strangely things come round! He might have been excused for cutting off *my* head, I don't deny. In fact, I should have told him so afterwards, the very next time I met him. But he has no grudge against you."

"He hasn't any grudge. Don't be silly. Who are these two young men with you?"

"Your nephew Reginald and his friend."

"Then—not you, Reginald, but Reggy's friend—I am going to give you some trouble. Strange, I seem to have said those very words before. I am sure I have. I am very slightly hit, and am not in the least degree feverish. I am *certain* that I said those words before, at some time or another, or, at least, words almost exactly like them."

"You did, sir," said James, quietly; "and to me."

"I think I remember your face ; and I am sure that I like it. Our billet is at Pozzo d'Orno. Will you come on with us ? "

"Certainly, sir."

"Have you a good set of nerves ? Can you help a surgeon ? I am hit, but not heavily. I must be with my regiment in three or four days. I don't know whether the ball is in my arm or not. Will you nurse me ? I can't reward you, but I am determined to see this thing out. Will you help me to it by nursing me ? "

"I will, most cheerfully, sir."

"I am the person to nurse you, Tom," broke out the Princess. "I will have no interference from any quarter whatever between you and me. At all events, I will not see you poisoned or assassinated under my own eyes, and me standing looking on. You do not know what you are doing ; you do not know in whose hands you are trusting your life. You are throwing away the benefits of one of the most extraordinary dispositions of Providence which, under me, have ever been accomplished——"

"Don't be foolish," said Colonel Tom, peevish with his wound ; "I want some one to see to me, and I choose this young man, and I will have him, by——"

"Have Reginald," cried the Princess. "If it was the last word I ever spoke, have Reginald."

"He is too great an ass, and you are too fussy. I shall have this young man."

"Hear his name," said the Princess. "His name is James Sugden."

"You know I have my own opinions about *that* matter, Aunt. Sugden, will *you* stay with me a couple of days, and trust me as I trust you ? "

"I cannot understand her Highness's allusions," said James, simply. "I only know that, years ago, you kindly and gently carried me to Silcotes, after I had been beaten by the poachers ; and that her Highness as kindly and as gently received me. God knows, sir, that I would do anything possible to repay your kindness, or hers."

"Stick by me, then. I want an English face. So you are that young monkey, hey ? I remember it all. What a pretty little dog you were ! Like a little fox."

"I am not pretty now, then, sir ? " said James, smiling, and looking steadily at him.

"No ; decidedly not."

"You do not like the look of me, sir ? "

"I like the look of you only too well. Where did you get those pleasant steady eyes of yours ? "

"My eyes are said to be like my mother's, sir," replied James, who thought that the Colonel was, in spite of his denial, wandering a little, and who wished to humour him.

"I wish you would get another pair," said Tom Silcote. "Your eyes are unpleasantly like another pair of eyes into which I used to look years ago, and have never forgotten, boy—never forgotten,—never forgotten. I suppose *she* will come, too, at the great gathering at the end of all things."

He was certainly feverish with his wound. The Princess, after her last rebuff, rode apart with Reginald, and poured her grief into his bosom. She did not like him, but she must tell her woes to some one, and so Reginald got the benefit of them now.

"What I have done for that man," she said, "and now he says I am fussy! Reginald, pray that you may never know the bitterness of ingratitude in those you love. It is the bitterest thing you will ever know."

"I have no doubt it is, Aunt. Can you tell me where is Anne?"

"At Vienna. After all I have done for him! Reginald, he does not love me! It is very bitter to me; he prefers a smooth-faced boy to me, who have sacrificed everything for him. Reginald, my dear, was your grandfather very intimate with this lad James?"

"Intimate? No. He never liked him. You say that Anne is at Vienna. I do not like this at all. I wish I was at Vienna with her."

"You will never have such a chance of seeing war again."

"I dare say not, and I don't wish it. I want to go to Vienna, and I have not enough money. I wish you would lend me some."

"I am sorry I cannot do so," said the Princess. "*He* wants it all."

So talking, they got to the village of Pozzo d'Orno, well to the Austrian rear, and halted at last.

Colonel Silcote was decidedly feverish, but kept to his resolution of moving with his regiment, as soon as it was ready to move. Meanwhile, he banished the Princess and Reginald, on the very rude grounds which he had stated above, that the one fussed, and that the other was a fool, and imperiously insisted on James's ministrations, in the very way in which men, who have been spoilt by women all their lives, do demand the services of other people—and, in nine cases out of ten, get them.

He took a strange fancy, almost a passion, for this son of his, thrown in his way so strangely, little dreaming why. The young man's eyes he remembered to be like other eyes not seen for

twenty years : but he had forgotten, or thought he had forgotten, his deserted wife's voice ; yet James's voice was strangely pleasant and soothing to him. He did not connect the eyes and the voice together at all ; yet they had the effect of making him silent, very thoughtful, and more gentle than he had been for years.

"He insists that no one shall come near him but you," said the dismissed Princess, with a sniff. "You had better go and see what *you* can do with a man who has cast off, in his base ingratitude, those who have sacrificed everything for him. He will curse and swear at you, and try to strike you, but I daresay you will not mind that."

"Not a bit," said James.

The Princess was as far right in what she said as this : Tom Silcote, a terrible bully, would most certainly, at ordinary times, have sworn at *her*, or at any one else, who had kindly tried to assist him when he most wanted assistance. It is the way of some men to be fractious and brutal as soon as they are thrown entirely on the kindness and love of those whose lives are bound up in theirs ; and it was his way generally. Not so now. He swore a good many oaths at his uniform, his shirt, his own clumsiness, Giulai's stupidity, and so on ; but none at James.

"Come here and help me to peel, lad," he said, "and see if you and I cannot pull through it without the doctors. What frightful humbugs they are ! It would not take many hours to learn *their* trade, as far as I have any experience."

"You have not had much knowledge of them, I should think, sir," said James, after he had gently removed his shirt, and the whole magnificent torso of his father lay bare before him. "Men who carry such a chest as yours are but poor customers to the doctors. Your poor brother, Mr. Algernon, knew more of them than you are likely to do. He loved his doctors dearly. It was taking him away from his doctors that killed him, I doubt."

"Killed him ? Algy ?" cried Colonel Silcote, starting up.

"He is dead, sir."

"Dead ! Why, that was the finest fellow that ever was born, I tell you. It is impossible."

"I quite agree with you in your estimate of him, sir ; but he is dead and buried for all that ; and I am engaged to his daughter."

"It is an infernal shame," said the Colonel.

"I hope you will be brought to look upon your niece's engagement differently in time, sir," said James, purposely misunderstanding him on religious grounds. "Do you think that you could

make it agreeable to yourself to be quiet for a few minutes, while I see what is the matter."

The Colonel submitted.

"Here is a nasty blue-red cut over the surface of the deltoid," said James; "but you have lost very little blood. We must have the doctor to this; it is beyond me."

"If I do I'll be——"

"Invalided, you were going to say. Not at all. It is a mere scratch. How about this broken head of yours, Colonel? The Count seems to have given you the St. George. Let me look at it."

Tom Silcote submitted his curly, splendidly-shaped head to the inspection of his son quite quietly. James pronounced once more for the doctor, and carried his point. The doctor was introduced—a small Czech gentleman, the glory and pride of whose life was that he had been born and bred at Zuckmantel. Why he was proud of being a Zuckmantel man no one ever knew; but he gloried in it, and was personally offensive in many ways to Colonel Silcote.

The doctor thought he was going to speak first, but he was mistaken. Silcote raised himself on the sofa from his hips, casting off the uniform coat which James had put over him, and opened fire on the doctor in German, before he had time to mention Zuckmantel.

"Now look here, you doctor. I wish you to understand my case at once. I am wounded slightly, and want to be set right instantly. I want to be fighting again in two days from this time."

"The great Frederick, passing through Zuckmantel," began the doctor—

"—— the great Frederick, and Zuckmantel, and you," said Tom Silcote. "I tell you that I want to fight again in two days. Will you come and look at me, or will you not? You and your Zuckmantels and Fredericks. If you can do anything for me, say so.—If you can't, go. This is the most miserable little humbug in Europe," he added to James in English.

The little doctor looked at him on the head and in the arm, and said that he must be invalided.

"Look here," said Tom Silcote. "If you declare me invalided, I will denounce you to-morrow. You are taking pay from a Government which you are trying to overturn. You are a leading member of the Democratic Committee of Breslau, if you are not president. I have letters of yours which would condemn you ten times over. How did I get them? Why, your friend Kriegsthurm gave them to me as a safeguard when I came on this

campaign, so that I might hold them in terror over you. He was afraid that you would poison me—a fate which I have avoided by taking internally none of your filthy drugs. If you invalid me to Vienna, you go to Spandau the next day.”

The doctor examined him again, while James, sitting behind his father, parted his hair for the doctor’s examination.

The doctor took a different view of the matter this time. The cut on the head was a slight scalp wound now, of no consequence. The wound on the arm was merely a skin graze, with a great deal of ecchymosis, undoubtedly. There was no reason why the Colonel should be invalided. He applied his remedies.

“You are helping to ruin your cause, you doctor,” said Tom Silcote, when he had finished his work. “I am better already. In two days, thanks to you, I shall be fit for my work again. At the throat of you scoundrelly, half-concealed democrats, sword in hand.”

“You should not have said that,” said James, when the doctor was gone.

“Why not?” asked Tom Silcote.

“Well, it was not gentlemanly, and their cause is the best, you know.”

“Not the cause of a creeping little toad like that. He takes Austrian money.”

“I do not speak of him. I speak of the Sardinian cause against the Austrian. I am an Italian at heart.”

“I doubt that I am also,” said Tom Silcote; “but you cannot sympathize with the miserable spawn which both sides use, and which both sides despise. Now let me sleep; I am very tired with marching and fighting, and I want rest.”

The little Zuckmantel doctor, who makes his first and last appearance here, had given James orders that the Colonel’s arm must be dressed again in the middle of the night. He added, also, that he entirely forgave the Colonel for swearing at and denouncing him. He was an Englishman, as was also Monsieur, and the English always swore and denounced when poorly.

James lay beside his father on the floor, and not having slept, arose between twelve and one, and prepared to awaken him. He looked at him for some time before he woke him, and thought, as an artist, what a wonderfully handsome man he was. The curls which he remembered on the night when he had crept from his bed to follow the pouchers were but slightly grizzled as yet; many younger men might have exchanged locks with Tom Silcote without disadvantage. And in sleep, in quiescence, while passion was dead, the face was extremely beautiful.

So the poor fellow slept, watched by his own son ; father and son alike being utterly unconscious of their relationship. Around the house, where he lay, artillery rumbled, shaking the house, and muttered away into silence eastward ; squadrons of cavalry passed trampling ; battalions of infantry passed with a steady, measured rustling, broken sometimes by a sharply-given word of command. The Austrian army, already beaten, was moving eastward, 200,000 strong ; and there was scarcely a man among them all who had so little business there as had Colonel Silcote.

Of all the Silcotes he had wasted his life the most perversely, the most persistently. His fate should have been by the ordinary laws of poetical justice, to die alone, unaided, uncared for, unwept. Yet his son was watching him with tenderness, and only disputing for his right to do so with the poor Princess, whom he had ruined. Is he the first instance of by far the least meritorious member of a family being the best beloved after all his misdoings ?

The night was hot, and he lay with his great chest bare, heaving up and down with the regular breathing of sleep. His face was very calm, and James doubted very much if he did wisely in awakening him ; but, after a time, looking at his face, he took his right arm, the unwounded one, and felt his pulse.

Colonel Silcote, without moving, quietly opened his eyes, and spoke.

"None of the whole of them left but you ? They were all here just now. I was marching into Exeter, and overtook a weary girl under the hedgerows ; and then I was at Dunstegan, and cut in before Tullygoram, and danced with a beautiful girl in spite of him. And the Devonshire girl and the girl of Dunstegan were one and the same, and had the same eyes. And I awoke, and found them looking at me out of your head. Boy, I am going to die."

"Nonsense, Colonel," said James ; "your pulse is quiet ; you will be quite well to-morrow. You are not going to die."

"Not here. Not in this bed. No ! By heavens, you are right there, old boy ! But the end of it all is very near ; and upon my word and honour, I cannot see very particularly why it should not be."

"You have many years of useful and honourable life before you, sir, I hope," said James.

"I don't hope anything of the kind," said Tom Silcote. "I have so many years of useless and dishonourable life behind me, that I begin to think that it will be better to close my account against the higher powers as soon as possible. If I were to mortgage my future career, with good behaviour as interest, I never could

pay it. The accumulation of interest would destroy the capital in a very short time. I tell you I *can't* behave well. If I lived, which I am not going to do, I might gain in time the respectable vices of old age. But it would take so long; I am so dreadfully young. You may depend that a fellow like me is much better out of this world than in it."

"I cannot see that, sir," said James.

"God forbid that you should. You are going to dress my arm; do so, and listen to what I say. You have a clear head and a good memory. After I am dead, I wish you to tell my father these things. I shall march to-morrow."

James promised to remember them.

"Nineteen years ago I was honourably married to a girl I met in Devonshire. The particulars of that marriage my aunt, the Princess, has in a despatch-box, which I have given into her possession.

"I have great reason to fear that my father has been sadly abused about the conduct of his late wife, poor Algy's mother. If he can get hold of the Princess, I believe that she is quite prepared to tell him everything. I fear that she and a man called Kriegsthurm have used him very sadly; but he must be tender with her. He was fond of me once; and you must tell him, now that I am dead and gone, and will trouble him no more, that he must be tender with her. Out of my grave I shall insist on that. My aunt is in many respects the best of us all. I insist that my aunt must be kindly used. Again, I am sure that Miss Raylock knows now the whole of this miserable complication from one end to the other. If she does not, Kriegsthurm does. Give me my *havre-sack*: it is hanging on the foot of the bed."

James did so.

"This Kriegsthurm is a very good fellow, but a most consumed rascal. Here are papers which commit him to the Austrian Government, for he has been Italianizing, the scoundrel, the moment he saw there was a chance of our being beaten. Put these papers in the hands of my father, and he will bring him to book with them. My father was at one time one of the first and shrewdest lawyers in England. He is a perfect match for Kriegsthurm.

"You must also give my love to my father, and tell him that I am sorry to have been so bad a son to him. I would not add that I could not help it, or that he might have been a better father to me. I wish him to discover whether my wife is alive or not—his sister has the particulars of the marriage—and to pension her. I had no family by her. You are hurting me."

"I am very sorry, sir," said James; "I am but a clumsy nurse."

"I had no family by her, at least as far as I know. I should wish him to find her out and pension her, if she is alive. I behaved very ill to her, I fear. Have you done?"

"I have done now, sir," replied James. "You had better sleep."

"I have been sleeping; I cannot sleep again. I shall sleep long and soundly in a few days. Sit beside me, and talk to me."

CHAPTER LIV.

THE ENEMY ADVANCES.

A FRENCH officer, riding up to the first of the Silcote carriages, took off his hat and bowed low.

"I really doubt if it is safe for Monsieur to advance further," he said. "Monsieur can of course please himself, but, until we have gained another victory, I would wish to point out to Monsieur that advance is, to say the least, dangerous. The enemy were here the day before yesterday. Some of them are here still."

He pointed to a few stark heaps which were lying in the summer grass, in the field to the left of the road. Silcote understood him at once.

"I thank you for your politeness, sir: we will go no further. Young ladies," he continued, "dismount, and go into that house opposite: I will be with you directly."

Miss Lee and Mrs. Thomas Silcote did so at once. Mrs. Thomas knew from old experience that she was in the presence of death, although she had not actually made out the Austrian corpses. Miss Lee saw a look in her face which made her silent, and which caused her to follow. The two women silently left the carriage, politely handed out by the French officer, and went towards the house. The French officer remained. Silcote and Arthur leaned over the side of their carriage talking to him, while Boginsky came up from the second carriage, and stood beside the French officer's horse.

"Arthur," said Silcote, "there is some Moselle somewhere, and I am thirsty; get some. Monsieur, we are much indebted

to you. I perceive that we are passing into the real regions of war. Has there been, then, an actual cataclysm?"

Boginsky and Arthur laughed at his pedantry. Seeing that Silcote laughed himself, the French officer, drinking his glass of Moselle, laughed also.

"We heard that there had been an engagement," said Silcote, "but we were not aware how near our British audacity had brought us to it. Are those blue and white heaps lying there on the grass, actually Austrian corpses?"

"They are such, Monsieur, a small instalment."

"What is the name of this place?" asked Silcote; "and what are the details of the engagement?"

"This place is Genestrello. Beyond you see the heights and the village of Montebello. You have never heard of Montebello. No; nor did any one until yesterday. Yet Montebello will live in history beside Lodi and Arcola. We carried the heights of Montebello yesterday. It was only the first of a great series of victories. We have already demoralized the Austrians. The rest is quite easy."

"Ho!" said Silcote; "then it is all over. Arthur, give this gentleman another glass of Moselle. Can you give me any further details of this action of yesterday, my dear sir?"

"With the greatest pleasure," replied the French officer. "Here at Genestrello the Sardinian light horse, in command of Colonel Count Frangipanni, met the Austrian cavalry, under command of Colonel Silcote,—a compatriot of yours, by the way. Each regiment was beaten in turn, and the Austrian Colonel Silcote was desperately wounded by the Sardinian Colonel Frangipanni; after which the Austrians retreated."

"You hear all this, Arthur," said Silcote. "Can you tell me, sir, what became of Colonel Silcote?"

"He rode away after his regiment," said the French officer. "I know no more."

"Have you any other details of the engagement which you can tell me, sir?" asked Silcote.

"Well, I doubt it," said the Frenchman. "There was the Princess Castelnovo, who charged with the regiment; and there were two young English artists, whom she took prisoner by threatening them with her revolver. Beyond that I know nothing."

"Altogether this looks very sad, Arthur," said Silcote. "But we will go on, and see the end of it."

CHAPTER LV.

THE PRINCESS'S TALISMAN.

"Is he dead?" said the Princess scornfully to James, coming up to him while he was quietly smoking in the sun in front of the Colonel's quarters at Pozzo d'Orno.

"Is who dead?" asked James, in surprise.

"Your new friend, Colonel Silcote; the man for whom I have sacrificed everything, and who has taken up with a boy like you; excluding me, and refusing to see me. Is he dead?"

"No, my lady. He is going on very well."

"He and I were both better dead. Will he see me?"

"He says he will see no one whatever."

"Except you?"

"Except me. He is a little off his head. He wants to fight again. I have told him that he is not fit for it; but he insists."

"And swears at you? Good!"

"He swears, certainly, but not at me."

"Would he swear at me, do you think, if I saw him?" said the Princess.

"I doubt he would, my lady."

"He has been doing it already, I suppose?"

"No," said James, suddenly and promptly. "If he had done it once, I should not have allowed him to do it twice. But he has not done it once. My dear lady, he loves you as well as ever, but wants to fight again, and thinks that you would dissuade him from it. If you saw him, and did so, he would swear at you certainly. I will tell you the simple truth. He has forbidden me to let you see him."

"This is the very basest ingratitude," said the Princess.

"On the contrary," said James, "he merely fears that you will persuade him to fight no more; and that he will not have strength of purpose to resist you."

"Have you been persuading him to fight?" asked the Princess.

"No. I am a credulous and foolish woman; but I cannot believe that you, with your gentle young face, could be such a wretch, such a villain, as that. Any money which you may get by the murder of Colonel Silcote will be a lifelong misery to you."

James thought she was mad. "You have puzzled me two or three times lately, my lady, and you are puzzling me more than ever now. I have tried to dissuade the Colonel from fighting any more, and indeed have pointed out that he, as an Englishman, has no

business to be fighting at all. But he is resolute. God knows I would stop him if I could."

The Princess seemed satisfied. She came and sat beside James on the bench. James put down his cigar.

"You are a young smoker," she said, "and are extravagant. That cigar is one of Tom's own regalias, and cost sixpence. I paid for that cigar, and consequently know its price."

"I thought that the smoke would annoy your ladyship; that is all," said James.

"I see," said the Princess. "Your manners are very good. You are not one of those wretched young prigs of the present day who puff their tobacco-smoke into every lady's face as a matter of course, without any apology. But I regret to say that Tom as spoilt me in this matter. I like the smell of tobacco."

James of course took up his cigar.

"Now we shall be comfortable together," said the Princess. "You like cigars?"

"I like them very much."

"What else do you like?"

Arthur had put this question to him before; and he had answered "Several things;" but it was a very difficult question. He gave a general answer.

"I think that I like most things, my lady."

"Do you like jewels?"

"I daresay I should if I had ever seen any," said James. "But then you know I have not."

"They are very nice, these jewels," said the Princess. "Believe an old woman when she says that nothing satisfies the soul like jewels. A beautiful young man is a glorious thing: a beautiful woman is still more glorious. But they don't last. Your beautiful young man comes in time to look out of a bow-window in St. James's Street; and your beautiful young woman—why as for her, she may become anything which you like to put a name to. Do you understand me?"

"I thank God I don't," replied James.

"But with regard to jewels. *They* never change. Look at this sapphire. This is one of the finest sapphires in Europe. None but a Silcote would wear it on a battle-field. It is a frosted sapphire, the very rarest of jewels, scarcely ever seen. Ten thousand years ago the stone was exactly the same. Seven hundred years ago a magician in Thibet engraved these letters on it, which, as you see, let the eye through the frosted surface into the wine-dark depth of the jewel. Do you see?"

"It is wonderfully beautiful, even to my eyes, madam."

"It is a talisman, in fact. The magician sold it to Genghis Khan; it descended to Kublai Khan; Kublai Khan gave it to Maffeo Polo, who gave it to his nephew Marco; Marco, on his return to Venice from Genoa, gave it to the then Dandolo, from whom it descended to the Castelnuevos. The last Castelnuevo gave it to me, and I will give it to you—if you will let me see him."

"I doubt I should not know what to do with it, madam," replied James, extremely amused at finding himself named as last successor of a line which began by an Asian magician, went through Genghis Khan Polo, Dandolo, and ended in himself. She had used the exact kind of humbug which a London-bred boy, like him, would be the first to detect and laugh at, and he did not care a bit for the jewel, though indeed it was perfectly unique.

"Will you take it?" said the Princess.

"I think not."

"I *will* see him," said the Princess.

"Then why did you not go in at once, half an hour ago, before you tried to bribe me? I have no authority to stop you; go in now. I think that you ought to do so. I certainly cannot stop you."

"I never thought of that," said the Princess. How very curious. Well, here is the bracelet for you at all events. The setting is common, but it is a valuable jewel."

"I must decline it, my lady."

"I am glad of that," said she. "I will give you something else. Do you like rabbits?"

"Why?"

"Boys generally do, and I would have given you some. Or a toy terrier, or a set of cricketing things; or a boat; or a pair of carrier pigeons; or a set of Waverley novels; or anything which you boys like. But I am glad you did not take my jewel. I should have hated you if you had, I know. I would sooner bind myself to pay your expenses at Cambridge than part with one of my jewels. Well, then, I will go in and see him, and get sworn at. Is he alone?"

"He is quite alone. I must warn you, my lady, that his temper is very awkward. But it is right that you should see him. He will be furious with me, but it is right that you should see him. Be gentle with him."

"Gentle with him, boy? That I should be told to be gentle with him! Will he be gentle with me; with the woman he has ruined?"

"I fear not."

CHAPTER LVI.

THE COLONEL RIDES AWAY INTO THE DARKNESS.

THE room was darkened from the blazing Italian sun, and she could scarcely see him. He was standing beside a window, the blinds of which were down, in full uniform, ready for the route, tightening some buckles of his sword-belt.

"Is that you, Sugden?" he said.

"No, it is I."

"Aunt? Why, I forbade him to let you in."

"But I came, nevertheless. Don't swear at me, Tom. I only wanted to see you again before the next battle. It was not so much to ask. Don't swear at me."

"Swear at you, Aunt?" said Colonel Silcote. "Am I a dog?"

"You do swear at me sometimes, now, you know. Let me have one more ten minutes of you. Let me kiss your curls once more. I swear that I will urge nothing. I swear that I will not urge you not to fight. Go; fight, if you will; and, if you are killed, I will abide the bitter end. Remember, Tom, that I am but a poor ruined old woman. They have all left me but you. Be kind to me for ten minutes: it is not much to ask. Only ten minutes."

She took out her little heavily jewelled watch and laid it on the table. "Only ten minutes of you," she said.

Colonel Silcote, with his sword clanking by his side, came to her and embraced her. "Aunt," he said, "I believe that you are the best woman in the whole world."

"I am only the most foolish," she said.

"I fear so also. Why could you not have given your money and your love to some one more worthy of them, instead of to such a worthless dog as your nephew Tom?"

"I don't know I am sure. I suppose it was that I was fond of you."

She sat down, and he, taking a footstool, sat at her knees, as he had been used to do in times gone by, long ago, when his curls were purple-black, and not grizzled as now. Then his head rested itself in its old place upon her knee, and her hand found its old accustomed place among his hair.

"It is like old times, Aunt," he said.

"Like the *very* old times," she answered. "I was thinking

just at that moment, whether, if my brother could see us two, the foolish outcasts of the family, he would forgive us?"

Colonel Silcote was not sentimental, at least in words, unless in the flurry and confusion succeeding a battle. He had been sentimental with James, certainly; but then James's wonderful likeness to his mother had something to do with that. Besides, he was suffering from the effects of his wounds.

"Do you know, Aunt, that the governor is on the whole a great trump? You may say what you like; I know how you have always backed me up; but, on the whole, it must be allowed that he has behaved much better to me than I have to him. I have done very badly. I don't think any one ever did much worse. I have done everything that a fellow could probably do, I think."

"You never drank," said the Princess, weeping.

"Bless me, no more I did," said the Colonel. "I doubt there will hardly be time to develop my character in that direction. I never thought of that before. I quite forgot that I have one virtue left, until you reminded me of it."

"You were always a faithful and dutiful nephew to me," said the poor old woman.

"And showed it by ruining you, and, by your own confession, bullying you and swearing at you. Aunty, my dear old Aunty, for your own sake do face facts."

"I am always facing the most disagreeable facts," she replied.

"If Kriegsthurm is not a fact, I don't know what is."

"Aunt," said Colonel Silcote, "do you want to get rid of that man?"

"No. I rather like him, to tell you the truth. But he is very expensive."

"I *cannot* make anything of you," he said, testily.

"No one ever could," she replied.

He muttered to himself, "I won't swear the very last night, poor old girl," and then tried her on a new tack.

"Aunty, don't you think there has been a deal of confusion, botheration, plotting, and humbug in our family for a whole generation?"

"A great deal too much. But it is I who have done it all."

"With my assistance. But don't you think that it is time for all this to end?"

"Most certainly," said the Princess; "but who is to unravel this fearful story?"

"I should say, No one. What the dickens do you want to unravel it for?"

"Will you, dear Tom, allow me to explain it to you in a few words?"

"If you attempt to do anything of the kind I shall leave the room at once."

"But you believe that I am innocent as a babe unborn?"

"Certainly; but then this is more to the purpose. If any wrong has been done at your hands to my father, you ought frankly to explain it. You ought to clear up everything; never mind the consequences. It is right and not wrong. My father has been abused among you. Is it not so? Come?"

"It is true."

"Throw yourself on his generosity. You told me just now you were innocent. I believe you, although I do not understand the business. Prove that innocence to him, and I will go bail he will forgive you everything. He forgave *me* often enough. Now do, like a good old soul, throw yourself on your brother's generosity; and let there be an end and finish of all these wretched complications—complications so interwoven that I don't believe that any one but old Raylock thoroughly knows them from beginning to end. *She* does. Heaven save any friend of mine from hearing her tell them!"

"But *your* prospects, my poor Tom?" said the Princess. "I have loved you, and striven for you through it all. I would rather have kept my jewels, if it were possible; but I want my brother's forgiveness for you, not for myself. And if we don't get his forgiveness for you, where are we? Never mind; it does not matter now that I have my fingers in your curls, and you are your old self towards me once more: what are a few bright stones? They are all yours. I only thought of *your* prospects."

"Bend down and kiss me," said Colonel Silcote, quietly. "Aunt, I expect the route every minute. One complication will soon be removed from among the Silcotes. My prospects lie in the rice-fields towards Palestro."

Suddenly she rose up, and he rose also. And he, in a solemn humour before, got more solemn as he watched her. She began walking swiftly up and down the room, with her arms held up, clasping and unclasping her jewelled hands rapidly, the dim rays of the sinking sun reflecting themselves on the agitated crystals, so precious, and yet so worthless, as though there were lightning in the room. She made three turns, and then she spoke.

"I loved them, but I love you better. You are the last left to me after a miserable worthless life. There are sixty thousand pounds' worth of them, and I will give them all to you, here on the spot, if you will let me have that little Czech doctor back, and let him invalid you."

"Aunt, you must be quiet; death comes to all men. Do you think that I could live in such miserable dishonour as that? Aunt, you must be quiet. Time is very short, and I expect my route every minute. Sit down."

She sat down, and began pulling off her rings. "The most of them are at Vienna," she said, "but they are all yours if you will be invalided. See here," she added, "here is the great Polo sapphire, with which I tried to bribe that boy to let me see you. It is in reality worth four thousand pounds. Take it, but be invalided."

"Aunt, dear," said Colonel Silcote, with irritation, "if you could contrive to leave off making yourself foolish, it would be so much better. Don't you see that, if I am killed, your jewels are no use to me; and, if I am not, they are of great use to you. Besides, I have to say some important things. I must go; my character would not be worth a rush, and you would alter your mind. The time is very short."

"Take this one jewel, at all events."

"What, your sapphire! Well, I will. I may be taken prisoner: who knows," he said, more cheerfully, "and then it would come in useful. So I will take it. It is an absolute gift, then, Aunt?"

"It is."

"Well, now, I have something more to say. Stay by me while I do a little job, and talk the while. There are scissors in my travelling-bag; cut off a large lock of your hair: we will wrap this in it, and I will hang it round my neck, and will direct it to be taken to you. A Frenchman will most likely do it, either on sentimental grounds, or in the hope of a very large reward from a real princess, not knowing that the value of the jewel, even if he undoes the little parcel, exceeds any reward you can give him fifty fold. You will see your jewel again, but it will not be yours. I destine it for some one else."

"You will come back again, and we will give a ball with the money, my dear. But if the jewel comes back alone, it shall be done with as you desire."

"Did you know that I was married?"

"Kregsthum told me you were; but I did not care to ask too many questions."

"I was; and it was the worst thing I ever did. You do not seem surprised."

She was not. She would not have been surprised to hear that he had been married five or six times over, and was very nearly saying so right out, but did not. She said,—

"I think marriage is a good thing in the main. I am not surprised at your being married."

"I was married once, and only once: to a woman I would make my duchess to-morrow, were I but a duke. I left her in poverty and in obscurity. She may be dead. I have carefully banished her from my thoughts for many years, and she has as carefully refused to be banished; and the eyes of this young artist who has been nursing me have, strangely enough, brought her before me again more prominently than ever. I have done many evil things, but what I did to her was the worst of them all. Now to business. If the jewel comes back without me, sell that jewel, find that woman, and provide for her with the money. Will you do this? You will find the necessary papers in the despatch-box."

"I will do it, certainly. But supposing all this misery happens, and I cannot find her, what then?"

"Give the money to this young artist. I love that fellow who has nursed me. She was the only woman who ever had the least influence over me for good. I treated her worse than any woman ever was treated; and yet, in gaming-hells and other places, that woman has often risen before me, and tried to scare me from evil."

"Have I had no good influence?" said the Princess.

"Scarcely, Aunt, scarcely. And yet—yes. At a time like this I will say yes. Come, decidedly, yes. You have loved me so truly, so persistently, so uninterestedly, that you *have* had a good influence over me. Why you have loved me so foolishly and so well, I cannot dream. Yet not I, to whom the morrow is death, can see that your persistent and disinterested love for me has done much for me. It has shown me—at least now, when it is too late—that there is a life higher than my own miserable, selfish form of life. Your standard, Aunt, has been a low and foolish one, I doubt; but how immeasurably higher it has been than mine! But men in their pleasures are so selfish; women must share *their* pleasure, or they have none. See about this poor wife of mine, and tell her that I tried to forget her, but never could succeed; and, above all things, attend to this artist lad, James Sugden. Idiot Kriegsturm is of opinion that my father will leave him the Silcote property, but that is bosh. Make friends with my father, and tell him it is the best thing he could possibly do. I hear a sound at the door, which you do not. Old Algy is dead, and so I shall see him before you. Tell Arthur to cure his priggishness; he did me no good by it. Marry Reginald and Anne on the first of April—for where should we all be if the propagation of fools had been stopped? There is nearly a twelve-

month before them : let them spend it in courting, and develop their folly."

"She don't like him," said the Princess.

"She has not seen his idiocy near enough, that is all. She thinks she can find a greater fool than herself. Put her fairly *en visage* with him, and she will give up the business as a bad job ; she is quite clever fool enough to see that she will never suit herself with so great an ass again. Time is short ; kiss me. You are still too young and handsome to kiss me before strangers. Let us part without scandal."

She kissed him, and said, "I heard nothing. Do not let us part while you are in this wild sarcastic mood."

"It has come," he said. "Now attention, Aunt ; you can hear now."

The door was thrown open by James, who said, looking curiously at his father.

"The adjutant, sir."

The adjutant stalked in, in a long white cloak, like a ghost, clinking his spurs on the stones. "We have got the route, my colonel ; towards Vinzaglio. Are you ready to march ?"

"I am ready, Von Gerolstein. Was I not always ready ?"

"Too ready, my colonel. But you are wounded, and we had hoped that you were invalided."

"Do the men want another to take them into action, then ?"

"God forbid, colonel. They only hoped that, if things went wrong, they might creep back again to rally round the kindest, best, and gentlest colonel they have ever had. Are you really coming with us ?"

"I am coming with you," said Tom Silcote.

"Then God deliver those who fall in our way," said the adjutant. "I will then sound to mount."

"Sound to mount," said Tom Silcote. "Good-bye, Aunt. James, follow as near us as you can, and take care of my aunt. Keep three or four trees in an irregular line between you and the artillery, *always*. Keep your horses' heads *towards* the French artillery *always*, because there may be time to avoid a *ricochet*, and the trajectory of these new cannon of theirs is very low ; and don't ride over dead bodies, or apparently dead bodies. Our fellows tell me that it is in bad taste, and dangerous. Give my love to my father, Aunt. I won't disgrace the family."

The night was dark and moonless ; only a few of the files nearest the inn, on which the light shone, could be seen with any distinctness ; tall, solemn, mounted figures, draped in white, getting dimmer and more ghostly as they stretched out along the

road right and left. Kissing the Princess, and shaking hands with James, Silcote mounted his charger and sent the word of command ringing clear through the night. The whole regiment began to wheel, to clash, and to swing into order; then, at another word, he rode away with his escort of sheeted ghosts, and the darkness swallowed him.

CHAPTER LVII.

PONTE MONTRIOLO.

"My dearest Archy," said Miss Lee to Arthur, "how much further are we to be dragged in the rear of the conquering army?"

"Further than we want, I fear, my love. But don't object. Both the governor and my sister-in-law are bent on going on. Are you frightened?"

"No. I am not frightened with you. Still, I did not expect to be brought into the presence of death when I came, as I have been the last two days."

"I daresay not. Neither did I. It will do both of us good. We have looked on death too seldom. Mrs. Silcote does not mind it much."

"How she goes up and down amongst the dying!"

"And among the dead. I dread that she will find something—some day."

"What do you mean?"

"Merely that those white and blue heaps which we saw at Grenestrello were men of Tom's regiment."

"Arthur, how horrible!"

"It is their discovery of this fact which makes them push on so fast."

"Good heavens! do they wish him dead?"

"I think not. I think they have some idea that they will find him wounded. I cannot say what they have in their heads. They are wonderfully subdued and quiet, and in continual confabulation with Boginsky. We had better walk faster, and regain the carriages."

"Let us stand aside, and see this battery pass," said Miss Lee to her lover. "How beautiful it is!"

"You admire artillery more than anything in all this brilliant hurly-burly," remarked Arthur.

"I do. There is something in the rattle and rumble of artillery which attracts me more than anything. Yet how beautiful these French have made their destructive apparatus."

"Yet military beauty is but a barbarous and unartistic style of beauty. No painter has ever succeeded in making anything of it when close to the eye. The Chinese make their apparatus of war purposely hideous. I am not sure that their civilization is not in that respect higher than our own." And he walked dogmatising in the old style under the mulberry-trees, with the French artillery passing them; and she hung on the wonderful words of wisdom which fell from his mouth, and treasured them up.

"Hark!" she cried, suddenly, burying her head in his bosom; "there it is again! That fearful shattering rattle of French musketry; and some beautiful human form ruined, maimed, or dead every three seconds. There is the artillery beginning. Arthur, take me away from all this. I cannot bear it."

"Other women do, and you must," said Arthur, quietly. "It will do you good. It will make you see what life is made of. Come, the carriages are waiting for us."

Mrs. Silcote, the Squire himself, and Boginsky, were a mile ahead. They had got the carriages drawn up on the side of the road, and were having breakfast in the first of them.

"Where are those two fools?" said Silcote, while drinking his coffee. "Their coffee will be cold before they come."

"They dropped behind for a lovers' walk," said Mrs. Thomas. "They will be here directly."

"That wo—— that cousin of yours, Miss Lee, will spoil Arthur again. She will make him as bad as ever."

"I don't see that," said Mrs. Thomas.

"I do," said the Squire. "There is not a word he says but what she believes in. And at times he talks outrageous nonsense."

"For example——" said Mrs. Thomas.

"Not for example at all," said Silcote. "I am not going to give a specimen of my own son's imbecility to please you or any one. I only say that she believes in every word he says."

"But sure it is right for a wife to believe in her husband's opinion to a great extent," said Mrs. Silcote.

"If he has been among men of mark; if he has been in the world; if he has heard questions argued—she should trust him

while discussing with him. But Arthur has heard little else in his life but crass common-room talk ; and he generalises on all things in heaven and earth on the shortest notice ; and this woman believes that he is a Solomon. He will be a greater prig than ever."

"You used to have such a high opinion of his judgment," said Mrs. Silcote.

"Argumentum ad hominem," growled the Squire ; "the real woman's argument. When I was fool enough to lock myself up for twenty years, I was also fool enough to believe that his folly was somewhat less than my own. What on earth is the use of quoting my own folly against myself? The general woman's argument is this: You said so once, and now you say so no longer ; therefore you are inconsistent. Therefore it does not matter what you say, it is unworthy of attention. Will you women ever get it into your heads that what *you* call inconsistency is often the highest wisdom—into *your* heads, the most inconsistent of created beings? I say that this woman will make him, with his schoolmaster ideas, a greater prig than ever."

"Yet a woman should surely believe in her husband," said Mrs. Silcote.

"Yes, if he really knows the world and its ways, and its ways of thought. But Archy don't."

"But they will hit it off."

"Oh, they'll hit it off fast enough. She is fool enough for anything. But she will spoil him : and he has been spoilt enough already."

"You are very disagreeable this morning, my dear," said Mrs. Silcote.

"It is quite possible," said Silcote, "because I don't altogether approve of this match, after all."

"She has four thousand a year ; she is beautiful ; and you know you love her."

"That is perfectly true. And this is also true, that I am going to make Arthur richer than she is. If Arthur had ever done anything in the world, I could not so much care about his getting a wife who would simply flatter him. But then Arthur has done nothing. No one ever heard of him. And this woman is going to flatter him into the belief that he is the finest fellow on the face of the globe."

"What does it matter, so long as they are comfortable together?" asked Mrs. Silcote.

Boginsky the gentle interposed here, seeing that the argument was likely to get warm.

"My grandmother, the old Countess Boginsky, surnamed the Terrible, was a very remarkable woman of German extraction, with a great knowledge of the world, and a wonderfully sharp tongue. She shut herself up for very many years in her Castle of Rabenstein, in the Teufelswald, and, like Silcote here, got herself the name in those parts as he did in England for being preternaturally disagreeable without cause, and for power of the repartee. My English is bad. Do I give offence?"

"Not a bit," said the Squire; who winced, however. "Go on."

"Madame, my grandmother," continued Boginsky in perfectly good faith, "was more *affreusement difficile*, more transcendently disagreeable, than ever was my excellent friend Silcote. Yet she was wonderfully clever. My aunt had a difficulty with her husband: indeed left him to go to my grandmother, and put her case before her. 'My dear,' said my grandmother, 'you should believe in your husband.' 'But I cannot,' said my aunt; 'he lies so.' 'My dear,' said my grandmother, 'recast his own lies for him, and tell them to him again the next day; he will then believe them to be originated by you, and you will get on charmingly.' 'But I cannot believe in them,' said my aunt. 'Tell them a few times, and you will get over that difficulty,' said my grandmother."

"Your grandmother seems to have been a very sensible sort of person, M. Boginsky," said Silcote, quoting the words of Louis XVI. on a very sad occasion.

"This conversation seems to me to be very silly, unprofitable, and immoral," said Mrs. Silcote. "I wonder where these two geese are? I would sooner listen to the deadly old rifle music in staccato than such nonsense. Your grandmother ought to have been ashamed of herself, M. Boginsky."

"She was not one of those who fulfilled every engagement in life, as madame has done," said Boginsky; "and I very much fear that she never fulfilled the duty of being ashamed of herself. In fact, I know she did not."

"If we sit here in this burning sun, waiting for these two, we shall quarrel," said Mrs. Thomas. "Hark, they are at it again: the French are engaged. By heaven, I should know that loose, wild rattle by now. Silcote, we cannot get the carriages forward further; come with me on foot. You are not angry with me?"

Silcote laughed good-humouredly, and they got out and started along the road at once. The battle of Palestro had begun. Boginsky looked after them for a moment; looked at the square, stalwart figure of the Squire, and at the graceful, elastic figure of Mrs. Silcote, as they walked rapidly away; and he remarked,—

"You belong to a strange nation, and you are the strangest pair of that nation I have ever seen. What on earth do you propose to yourselves: are you mad?"

He got a little canteen out of the carriage, which he slung round him. He told the courier that they were going to the extreme front on foot, and that he must do the best he could. The courier urged that the Austrians were massed on the left, and that the upshot of the day was extremely doubtful. Could not Signor Boginsky persuade monsieur and madame to stay by their carriages? In case of a failure in turning the Austrian right, monsieur and madame would find themselves in irremediable difficulties.

Boginsky perfectly agreed with him. "We shall make a fiasco if a retreat is necessary. But they are resolute to go, and I must go with them. Tell Mr. Arthur Silcote about our having gone forward. Don't move from here until he comes up, and take your orders from him." So he ran off after the Squire and his daughter-in-law, whom he quickly overtook.

"Ha!" said the Squire, "are you coming with us? This is kind. We did not think of you."

"I do not think that you considered anything, sir, when you made this determination of going to the front alone with madame. It is a very mad resolution: cannot I persuade you from it?"

"Why is it mad? We have before us there, the one a husband, the other a son. We have talked together about him so much, that we have determined to find him, for we have both forgiven him. Is there anything mad in that?"

Boginsky thought it a rather Bedlamite whim; but he had long before been told that the Squire was mad, and that Mrs. Thomas was odd, and so he said nothing, but walked behind them, and found that he had to walk fast too.

The Squire and his daughter-in-law were talking eagerly as they walked. There came a heavy shower without thunder, which wetted them all, and yet they walked on still, talking eagerly. Mrs. Silcote walked on the path to the right of the road, and Silcote walked on her left in the road. Then came some artillery passing them at a trot, taking the right side, as they do on the Continent. The trooper on the right of the gun nearly rode over Silcote; Silcote merely put up his left shoulder and got out of the way, joining Mrs. Silcote again at once, and beginning the conversation as eagerly as ever.

Boginsky wondered what they could be talking about. He went up to caution the Squire, and overheard them.

"I am quite prepared for what you propose, my dear," said the

Squire, "as I have said a dozen times before this week. If he chooses to acknowledge you, without knowing of your great inheritance, let us give him another chance. If he is not man enough for that, you are a fool if you allow him to recognise you."

"Might I ask, sir, once more," demanded Boginsky, "what is your particular object in this very insane expedition?"

"We are going after Colonel Silcote," replied the Squire. "We have information that his regiment is in the extreme Austrian right. We wish to go towards the Austrian right."

It caused no particular astonishment to the Squire to see that Reginald was standing beside Boginsky; there was too much noise to be surprised. He, however, thought it worth while to ask Reginald whence he had come, and where was James?

"He is in the Austrian lines, with Uncle Tom and Aunt Mary. But I came away, and got here through the rice-fields. I did not care to stay with them, for they are sure to be beaten. Uncle Tom calls me a fool, and Aunt is mad."

"Monsieur also is very mad," said Boginsky. "Will monsieur be so good as to cease talking in an excited way to madame on family matters, which surely may keep until this hell has burnt itself to cinders, to listen and to look? *That* is the Austrian right; will you go *there* after him?"

To their left was a field of blossoming maize, more than breast high, in which grew poplars, planes, mulberries, all now in full leaf,—a very little field, which dipped, not a hundred yards away, into squashy, green rice-grounds, intersected by runnels of water, through which blue-coated soldiers were trotting and splashing. Behind, a hillock and a red-roofed building. Beyond, a vast cumulus of artillery smoke, driven away from them by the wind; so great and so vast, that it competed with the real cumulus of the thunderstorm which was rapidly approaching from the south-east. Beyond this fictitious gunpowder cumulus rose a distant squarely-shaped Alp.

So much for what they saw; what they heard was still more terrible. A shattering rattle of musketry close to them, getting more furious and more prolonged as it grew more distant; beyond, the staccato of rapidly-worked artillery, shocking the ear. Boginsky was alongside of them now, and said, "That is the Austrian left: you will surely turn back."

But Mrs. Silcote said "No," adding, what seems to be improbable, that she had heard heavier firing from mere field-pieces before. "Reginald," she said, "you can guide us over the ground you passed yesterday?"

Reginald demurred strongly. It was a bad road enough on

horseback—utterly impassable on foot. He had great difficulty in getting through yesterday. The way lay on causeways, through rice-fields, and the waters were let out for irrigation. He almost refused.

“Are you afraid?” asked Mrs. Silcote.

“Yes,” said Reginald, petulantly.

“What are we to do now, then?” asked Mrs. Thomas.

“Reginald, who could have guided us, has turned coward.”

“Why, we must go on alone,” replied Silcote, “and leave Reginald and Boginsky.”

“I am going with you, monsieur,” said Boginsky. “I think that we are behaving like mad people, but I will go with you. Come, young gentleman, think yet once again, and show us the way by which you came.”

“It is not safe,” said Reginald. “We shall have to go under fire.”

“Don’t force the boy,” said Silcote, in perfect good humour.

“Let us pull through it together.”

“But he knows the way,” said Boginsky; and added some flowers of speech in his own language, the meaning of which could only be guessed by their emphasis. “If you *will* go on this expedition,” he said aside to Silcote, “I think that your only chance lies with this young gentleman. And I fancy that he wants bribing.”

“The infernal young coward,” said Silcote, “I would bribe him fast enough, but I don’t know what he wants. I’ll give him three or four hundred pounds, if that is any good.”

“He would take a bribe if you knew what to give him,” replied Boginsky.

“Let *me* bribe him,” said Mrs. Silcote. “I will soon manage the matter for you. I will not wait for your leave. Here goes,—

“Reginald,” she said, “you will just be pleased to take us to your uncle’s regiment at once, and as quickly as possible. Your grandfather emphatically *orders* you to do so.”

And he said not another word, but went. He had been used all his life to being ordered, and had only just broken loose from James, the last person who had ordered him. He was not displeased to find himself ordered about again, even though the order was to go under fire. He was not physically *afraid* of going with them; he hated more the bustle and the excitement of the thing than the danger. Yet, by his ten minutes’ hesitation at Palestro, he cleverly and dexterously disposed of all *his* chances of heirship which seemed so fair while his grandfather was in a sentimental mood about his wronged son Algernon.

"What a pity it is that Betts is not here ; what he might do in shares, for instance, with the telegraph ! A man with so much capital in hand as I have might have made a quarter of a million by the intelligence I have gained in the last ten minutes."

"I do not understand you, father," said Mrs. Silcote, as she took his hand to help him over a runnel in the rice-fields.

"I will explain," said Silcote. "That furious volcano, for which we have been pushing, has ceased its eruption—there, you have slipped your foot in, and have wetted it—you should jump further ; that furious volcano has ceased, and that means that the Austrian right is turned, and that they are in retreat."

Reginald and Boginsky had been going swiftly before them until now. She said quietly, "Call Reginald and Boginsky back."

Her voice reached them, and they turned to come. "Is the right really turned ?" she asked Silcote.

"There is no doubt of it. Why this comparative silence, otherwise ?"

"Then we shall see him. He is not one to be left behind. I shall see him, after twenty years, once more."

Reginald and Boginsky were beside them now.

"Is the Austrian right turned ?" she asked. Boginsky pointed to a mass of scarlet and red on a hill, backed by the smoke of musketry fire, and said, "The luck of the Tedeschi has forsaken him. He would not be crowned, and so Hungary is avenged in bitter tears. The star of the Second of December is in the ascendent."

"I do not happen to understand your allusions," said Mrs. Silcote. "All I ask is this : Are the Austrians beaten ?"

"They are most certainly beaten."

They passed on more swiftly now, for the way led out of the rice-fields, and passed round a low hill, whose few trees were ripped and broken by cannon shot. Reginald, getting excited, guided them well and swiftly. The firing was getting less furious, and more distant.

They were passing over the ground which had been crossed by the division of Gialdini only a few hours before : and were among the dead. At first the corpses lay few and far between—no wounded here, all killed by artillery at a long range ; but as they went on they grew thicker and thicker. A few ambulances were standing or moving among them ; and sometimes, when they were walking beside one, the shuddering defensive motion of an arm, or the ghastly stare of an agonized face, would tell them that some poor fellow had not passed the gate of death, but was too near it

to care much whether he was succoured or not. This was the fair work of musketry; and soon they came on the first white uniform lying solitary among the blue around. Boginsky took off his hat respectfully.

"The foremost man, sir," he said to Silcote. "The hero of the day. In '49 I prayed to be cold and stark like him in the post of honour. I can at the least take off my hat to him now."

Silcote only nodded at him, for a growing awe was upon him; Reginald was going so straight and so swift. Towards what?

"We are close to Ponte Montriolo, now," said Reginald, turning suddenly. "That is it among the trees."

"Why are we going there?" asked Silcote under his breath.

"They were there this morning," replied Reginald. "Aunt and James, and Uncle Tom. But they will not be there now. It is all silent."

Very nearly. There were a few live figures moving about, but there were more dead than living. A little sluggish stream, crossed by a stone bridge, against which abutted, over the stream, a low white one-storied house with a red roof; close by, among fine trees, was a mansion with a cupola which rose above them; a little further away another, very like it. In front, to the eastward, beyond the woods, the war was feverishly growling itself into a temporary silence; but here, by this little bridge, there was silence, almost peace.

"There they are," whispered Reginald.

"There are who?" replied Silcote, also in a whisper.

"Aunt and James," replied Reginald, aloud. "That is Aunt sitting down under the wall, and James is standing by her. I don't see Uncle Tom."

"Thank God," said Silcote. "He and his cavalry are far away, by now."

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," said Reginald. "His regiment was ordered to the rear, and he saw that he was too weak to ride any further, and volunteered to stay with the 11th Jägers. Did not I tell you that? No, by the way, I don't think I did."

"Stay back all of you," said Mrs. Silcote. "The worst has happened, for I see her sitting there and rocking herself to and fro. No one has so good a right there as myself, as she, and James. Keep them back, Silcote. After so many years?—"

He had fallen quite dead, from a suddenly mortal wound, headlong on his face which was only saved from laceration on the ground by the sword-arm, held up in defiance, upon which his face had fallen. He looked as though he was asleep when they found him, and then, when James raised his heavy head upon his knee,

they thought he was alive ; for death had come so sudden and so swift that the last fierce challenge had been but half uttered, and had left its expression in his half-opened mouth ; and a dim ghost of the fury of battle was still looking at them out of his staring eyes.

It is very difficult to know what to say, and what to leave unsaid. The reader must place himself in the situation. The Princess was more experienced in one little attention, we shall all want some day, than was James. When that was done, she sat down and began rocking herself to and fro, singing.

Singing in a very low voice, sometimes in German, sometimes in Italian. Her grief was so deep that Providence in His mercy had dulled it. There was a deep, bitter gnawing at her heart, which underlay everything else ; as the horror of his doom must make itself felt in the last quiet sleep of a criminal before his execution, let him sleep never so quietly. Yet her feeble intellect was for a time numbed, and, as James feared, mercifully crazed : it refused to acknowledge what had happened. These half-witted women can love wondrous well.

No help had come near them. James thought of his position. "The living," he thought, "are more than the dead. If I can get her away I will."

He made two or three efforts, but she only pointed to what lay beside them. The third time she answered him, "We must wait till he wakes." And then, believing that she was crazed, he said no more, and so stood against the wall, while she sat on the ground, rocking herself to and fro, singing in a low voice.

It was no surprise to James to see his mother coming swiftly towards them through the dead. He was perfectly aware of the direction in which Reginald had gone, and was sure that his mother would follow him to the very verge of safety. She had had previous experience of battle-fields : he almost expected her. But when, without noticing him, she knelt beside the dead man's side first, gazed in his face, which now, the conventionalities of death having been gone through, was dull, calm, and expressionless, when she kissed him, and smoothed his curls—my hand is too rude to go on. When he saw all this he was both surprised and frightened.

Still more so when the poor Princess roused herself to say, "I know you, my fine madam : you are Mrs. Sugden. He belongs to me, I gave up all for him." And his mother replied, still looking on the dead man, "You were a good friend to him, and I thank you, but I gave up more to him than you did. I am his widow."

The Princess could not understand this at first, but began her low singing again. The next thing which James noticed was Silcote himself, with his great square solemn face, looking down upon his dead son.

Mrs. Silcote looked up in his face. "I won't reproach you more than I can help," she said; "but, if you had not made that concealment about my inheritance to me, this could never have happened. It would have been better that he had had it and spent it all a hundred times over, than that this should be."

Silcote bowed his head and said nothing. The next voice which was heard was that of the good Count Boginsky. "My dear friends," he said calmly, "to whom am I to address myself concerning arrangements?"

Silcote went away with him. "What would you recommend?" he asked. "This is a terrible thing for us, my dear Count. That poor corpse which lies there was once my favourite son; that lady kneeling by him is his wife. He had quarrelled with both of us, and we were pursuing him to force him into a reconciliation, and we find him dead and stark. Our only object was to renew our love to him, sir. He had been very extravagant, and had not treated her well, but we could have tamed him, and now he is dead. I cannot realise it. I meant to have forgiven him all for her sake, if he had only acknowledged her."

"You *have* forgiven him, have you not?" said Boginsky, who since the defeat of the Austrians was taking a higher line altogether.

"God knows I have," said Silcote. "But details. I do not know how to arrange matters. I never was at fault before, but I am infinitely shocked and distressed. It is inconceivable at present, but it will be terribly conceivable soon. *Can* you arrange?"

"As a friend. You and yours have been good friends to me. I shall be in a different position soon. Will you give me the title of friend, as an equal, and let me manage matters for you in *that* capacity? May I order as I please?"

"You may order as you please."

"Then go to that poor Princess, your own sister, and comfort her, and win her confidence. Go and do that, Silcote. She has been a misguided woman, but a loving one. Go and save her heart from breaking. Now that he lies cold and dead, she has no one left but you."

CHAPTER LVIII.

SUNT LACHRYMÆ RERUM.

AND so Boginsky went among the others, while Silcote went alone to his sister.

She still sat on the ground. The movement of the others around her, and her jealous wonder at Mrs. Silcote having taken her place solemnly and silently beside the corpse, had aroused her, and had enabled her to pass into the second stage of her grief, that of terror. She sang no more, but sat and looked around her fearfully. At this time Silcote came and bent over her. She spoke first, looking wildly up into his face.

"Any time but now, brother," she said hurriedly. "I know that I cannot die for many years. You shall reproach me for the rest of my weary life for all my wickedness towards you, if you will only spare me now. Any time but now. There is a feeling of deep horror on me at this time, which is almost too much to bear. All this is my doing. I have no right to ask for mercy; I have ruined your life and have killed him. I do not ask you to spare me; I only ask for a little time."

"Sister," said Silcote, gently.

"I do not ask to be spared, brother. I will bear any penance you may put upon me. I only ask you not to begin it just yet. I cannot repair the wrong I have done, I cannot replace the papers I stole, I cannot bring the dead to life. But I can bear my penance. I only ask you to spare me just now. I know that you are just and hard, and that you will be hard and just with me; which will be terrible. Only remember that I have not one human soul left to love me in the whole world: except perhaps Kriegsturm."

"Mary, my dearest old girl," said the Squire.

"I beg your pardon!" said the Princess.

"My good old Mary: my dear old sister. I will love you."

The poor woman drew herself away from him. "Don't speak like that," she said. "You had better begin on me at once than speak to me like that. Because," she added, almost quaintly, "you don't know everything yet, and so, if you forgive me now, we shall have to go through the whole business again. I wish you would leave me alone. I can bear it all if I have time. But I am frightened."

"My dear Mary," said Silcote, bending over her and kissing her, "you are mazed with this dreadful catastrophe. Can you listen to me? I will speak very slowly. I know everything, or

believe I know everything, and will seek, if you wish it, to know nothing more. Everything is entirely forgiven, even if it were a hundredfold as much."

"It was Kriegsthurm," said the mazed Princess. "It was he who committed that unutterable wickedness. She was pure and good, and I was innocent of that."

"Of course you were. But listen carefully, my poor Mary. Suppose that frightful device had been yours, which I never believed, I have so entirely forgiven everything that I could take you to my bosom just the same as I do now."

She repulsed him. "Not yet," she said. "I will not kiss you till you know the whole truth. I am perfectly certain that you do not know the whole truth."

"Yes! yes! I do," remarked Silcote. "Come, Mary, don't reject me and my love after so many years' estrangement. Let there be an end of all this shameful, miserable plotting and counterplotting. We have served one another ill. You served me ill once forty years ago, and I have served you ill ever since. Let there be a finish and an end of it."

The thunderstorm which followed Palestro was on them. The lightning had struck a tree within sight, and the rain began to come down furiously. "We must move, sister," he said, and she raised herself on his arm. He took her into a little doorway in the wall of the little white house, and they sat down together on the ground side by side, as they had done often as children. In a minute or so her head lay upon her brother's breast, and she turned her eyes up into his.

"Is it really true that you are not going to be cruel to me, after all my folly?" she asked.

And he kissed her tenderly. "We will give the rest of our lives to one another, and to others. All hard words and hard thoughts must be buried in the grave which Boginsky is getting ready yonder. Let us sit here and watch the storm."

The war had roared itself into stillness, and the storm was past, leaving the Italian blue unstained overhead where they all stood, a silent party, round the grave which the hired peasants had just completed. It is by the side of the canal among the trees, in a very quiet place, quite out of sight of the village, or indeed of any building except one tall campanile, which rises from among the trees close to him, and seems to keep him company as he sleeps.

"I little thought how well I loved him," said Silcote.

"Few could help it," said James, quietly. "I did so, little dreaming that he was my father."

"I little thought that you two would meet, and meet so," said

Mrs. Silcote. "God has been very good to you and to him in that matter. Come, and let us leave him to his rest."

They were all dry-eyed, and only the Princess had not spoken. Seeing that she did not hear him, Silcote took her tenderly by the arm to lead her away. She did not speak even then, only set up a low childish wail so mournful, so desolate, so unutterably sad, that the flood-gates of their grief were loosened, and they walked away together with bowed heads.

CHAPTER LIX.

SILCOTES.

THE oaks at Silcotes grew from gold to green, then grew golden once more, and then settled down into the full green of summer; yet stillness, or nearly stillness, reigned over hall and park, garden and forest. The perfectly-ordered machine, so long wound up, went on just the same, the least noticeable fact about it being the absence of its master.

The neighbours got excited and curious about the house, the more so as week after week went on. They met the horses exercising regularly, and the men looked much as usual. The deep wailing bay of the bloodhounds was still heard by the frightened children, whose mothers told them that the Dark Squire was away to the war—a piece of information which made him seem in their eyes more weird and more dark than before. Everything, said the gossips, was going on just as usual at Silcotes, save that some most astounding family discoveries had been made, and, without doubt, Silcote was following the track of the Italian army.

People who had not called for years came and called now, out of sheer honest curiosity, a curiosity which was doomed to continual disappointment. Everything was unchanged. The lodge gates were opened with the greatest alacrity; lawn and drive were well kept; the flower-beds were blazing out as heretofore, and the gardeners were busy among the new French roses; the door was opened to the visitor by the butler and two men in livery, but "Mr. Silcote was in Italy, and was not expected home at present." That was all that could be learnt.

Lord Hainault of course heard of all these things, and, with his worthy wife, wondered very much at them. He had seen but little

of Silcote in his life, and what little he had seen he had not liked. He seldom had any personal correspondence with him, but he had taken it into his head that a common should be inclosed: it was impossible that it could be done without stroking the Squire the right way, and so the Squire suddenly became a most important person. Lord Hainault began at breakfast-time by laying down the proposition that country gossip was just as bad as town gossip, and that he did not believe one-half of what was said about any one. He instanced Silcote, and so persistently argued from that example, that he triumphantly proved to himself and his hearers, by lunch time, that Silcote was in all human probability rather a good fellow than otherwise. At all events he, with his wife's entire concurrence, ordered his horse, and rode gently over through the wood to leave his card on Silcote, and to get his address.

"It is an uncommon nice place, this," he said to himself, as he came out of the forest into the glades of the park, and saw the way in which artificial order was growing out of nature. "A monstrous nice place: one of the best places in the whole county. What a sad pity it is that a clever man and a gentleman, as he *is*, should not be more civilized. The best landlord and the best farmer for miles, too. I *will* see more of him when he comes back; I feel certain that he is a good fellow."

And then he uneasily remembered the general and offhand accounts of Silcote which he had been accustomed to give, and pricked his horse into a trot, and so came round the corner of the drive on an exceedingly fine groom, whose master was close before him. Lord Hainault passed the groom, and rode up beside the master, a withered, handsome old gentleman, on a valuable cob.

"My dear Sir Godfrey Mallory!" said Lord Hainault. "You are riding far from home."

"I am only from Shiplake. I cannot ride far now. But I have a letter from Italy which tells me that Silcote is dead; and I, quite unconsciously, years ago did him a wrong, and I wish to find out whether there is time to explain my share in it in this world. I fear that Silcote has been sadly abused in his lifetime. He was not a bad fellow when I knew him, but jealous and ill-tempered. I wish I could have a talk with him. I have reason to believe that he has owed me a grudge about a very unhappy business in which I was innocent. I am not long for this world, and I cannot bear to leave a grudge behind."

"It is like your good-heartedness, Sir Godfrey," said Lord Hainault.

"You mean my good nature," said Sir Godfrey. "We selfish men of pleasure are generally good-natured. I should say that I have been the most good-natured and the most worthless man on the face of the earth. I can really *feel* nothing—not even this."

"Not even what?"

"Do you not see the house is shut up, and that I am too late with my explanations?"

The house was shut up in reality, and the two rode forward in silence.

"Is your master dead?" said Lord Hainault to the butler, taking the bull by the horns.

"My master is alive, my lord," said the butler; "but we are in sad trouble; sad trouble indeed, my lord."

Sir Godfrey Mallory left his card and rode away waving his hand to Lord Hainault.

"What has happened?" asked Lord Hainault.

"The young master is dead, my lord."

"Which young master?"

"Mr. Thomas, my lord."

"I thought he had been dead long ago," said Lord Hainault.

"I want Mr. Silcote's direction."

"Master is expected home at once, my lord," said the butler; and so Lord Hainault rode away also, saying to himself as he went, "Well, that scamp is well out of the way. Better the schoolboy than him." And that was all which the county represented by Lord Hainault had to say about Colonel Silcote.

One part of the great Silcote machine which was still in perfect order was the kitchen. Experts generally find that they make their very best efforts after a rest. The Silcotes cook, not condescending to cook for servants, had had an idle time of it for two months, and had taken to fishing at Wargrave. But when Mr. Betts, the senior Mr. Sugden, Miss Dora Silcote, and the children arrived suddenly at the hall, he put aside his fishing-rods, and did his best. Betts knew what good eating and drinking was, and was an old acquaintance of the cook's. Knowing he had some one to appreciate him he put his soul into the work, and Mr. Sugden and Mr. Betts sat down to a very good dinner indeed.

Not that Mr. Betts had the slightest business to take possession of Silcotes. Sugden was staying with him at St. Mary's when they got the news of Tom Silcote's death.

There was not the slightest reason for Betts moving; but he claimed great credit for taking active possession of Silcotes. As

he put it to the Squire, "The moment I heard of it I came off. I did not let the grass grow under my feet, sir; I came off at once." Silcote himself was half-persuaded that Betts had done him a personal service by "coming off" so promptly, though he failed to perceive entirely why Betts should take that particular occasion to kill his bucks and tap his Madeira. But Betts did both these things, and perfectly persuaded himself the while that he was piling obligations on the Squire's head, which a life-time of devotion on the Squire's part could never repay.

"So you did not see your way to the Italian campaign, Mr. Sugden?" said Betts after the soup.

"Why, no," said Sugden. "I got so heavily used in the Crimea, that after a feeble attempt I gave it up."

"A wise resolution, nephew."

"Nephew?" said Sugden, raising his great patient handsome face to Mr. Betts.

"Certainly," said Mr. Betts, promptly. "Your sister married the late lamented Mr. Thomas Silcote. My daughter married his half-brother, Mr. Algernon Silcote. Consequently I am your uncle. Don't you see?"

"I daresay I shall in time," said Sugden. "Am I to call you Uncle Betts, then?"

"My dear sir, that is entirely a matter of detail, a matter entirely between man and man. I would not for an instant urge a man in your position to give such a title to a man in my position. Still, there are rules about these things, I believe, and it would be flattering to me."

"I will call you Uncle Betts with the greatest pleasure," said Sugden, "if you like it."

"My dear sir, not for a moment. Between men of the world, like you and me, such distinctions are invidious. If you could possibly induce Mrs. Silcote, your sister, to greet me with the title of uncle, I should have nothing left to desire in this world."

"Oh! she would never do that," said Sugden. "She is very proud."

"You are quite sure that she would not?" said Betts. "Then let us say no more about it. She is the leading member of the family which I have entered, and her wishes must be studied. It would have been gratifying to my feelings, but let it go. I and you have other claims on Silcote besides those of mere recognition. The instant that you and I heard of this lamentable misfortune we came off promptly and rallied round him. That is a service which he is not likely to forget. Silcote is not ungrateful."

"I think myself," said Sugden, painfully and with difficulty, but with honesty also, just like the mere agricultural labourer which he was, "that we had better not have come at all. There is death in the house—the death of my sister's husband, which is bad enough; and also, from what I have gathered, disaster worse than death. It seems to me ill that we should be feasting here in the house of mourning. I am sorry that I came."

"There should always be a gentleman in the house at such times as these, my dear sir," said Betts.

Sugden wondered which of the two was the gentleman, and concluded, in his agricultural mind, neither; but he said—

"We will not discuss that matter. Tell me about Anne Silcote. Is the business so bad as I have guessed?"

"It is as bad as bad can be, and there is the whole truth, Sugden," said Betts, thumping his fist on the table. "There are no servants in the hall, and Dora has not appeared; so I can tell you the truth in a few minutes. I am a vulgar man, and a cunning man, and a man who will only cease to scheme for money when I am nailed in my coffin. But I am not an ungrateful man. I am not the mere snob which you would judge me to be from my manners. Algernon Silcote took me in when I was a bankrupt beggar, and showed me the beauty of a morality more noble than my own. The Squire heaped favours after favours on my head, and put me in the way of having cash again in hand to turn over. I have turned that money over. If there is a man in England who understands the handling of money it is myself. I am rich again, richer than you dream of. I only stay at St. Mary's because I think my benefactor Silcote would like it. Yet I tell you, Sugden, that I would have gone into the Bankruptcy Court again to-morrow, have given up every pound which I owned, if I could have prevented this last terrible scandal."

"What is it then?" said Sugden. "Here are the servants. Will you put those dishes down, and go away, if you please. Mr. Betts and I are talking business."

When they were gone Sugden resumed: "You seem to me to be two people, Betts," he said; "just now you seemed to me to be scheming about an utterly ignoble matter; and then immediately after you came out most nobly."

"I *am* two people," said Betts. "I was bred a share and stockjobber, and shall die one, and at times I try to be a Christian and a gentleman, like Algy Silcote, my son-in-law. Think it out for yourself."

"Well, I will. But about Anne. Is there anything like dishonour?"

"Utter dishonour, I fear, and utter ruin. She has gone off with a low Italian nobleman. A young Roman. Let us say no more about it."

"How did you hear it?"

"From a friend of mine, Kriegsthum. He is a great liar, but he dare not lie to me. He has made the Continent too hot for him generally, by universal political rascality, and must get back to England. He would not dare to lie to me. He has feathered his nest here pretty well, for I made four thousand pounds over his last telegram from Vercelli, in which he told me that the Austrian right was fairly turned, and that the Austrian army would not face the French rifled ordnance. I am afraid that the poor girl is lost."

"I am deeply sorry for this," said Sugden.

"So am I," said Betts.

"You say he is a noble Roman?" said Sugden.

"And a great scoundrel," said Betts. "Why, he is an *employé* of Kriegsthum's."

"When Italy is free," said Sugden, "he might make a good match for her."

"You have a good imagination," said Betts, "but he is a great scoundrel. Here is Dora."

Here was Dora. "Well, you two people," she said, "what treason have you been talking that you should have banished the servants? If you have done talking treason, I should suggest that they were recalled. If we *are* to take possession of grandpa's house without the slightest reason, I think we might make use of his servants."

CHAPTER LX.

THE LAST RAMBLE.

"WELL," said Dora to Mr. Sugden, "and so they are actually due. It seems incredible."

"The Squire has telegraphed from London, and will be here in half an hour. So we shall see them all soon now."

"Not *all*," said Dora.

"All, with the exception of Anne and Reginald," said Sugden.

"And my father and Uncle Tom," added Dora.

"They are at peace," said Mr. Sugden; "they won't hurt. I wish that Anne was as well off as they."

"Do you believe this about Anne?" said Dora.

"Of course I do."

"I don't," said Dora, emphatically; "not one single word of it."

"You cannot quite help it, I fear," said he.

"I can help it perfectly well," said Dora. "The whole story is a very clumsy falsehood. I tell you that it is the very last thing which Anne would do. And I know something which I could tell you, if I chose; but I don't choose—yes, I do—no, I don't. Look at me, and I shall make up my mind."

Sugden turned his handsome brown face, as calm as a Memnon, as gentle and simple as a child, on hers. She looked at it for a moment, and made up her mind.

"Yes, I *do* choose. I can tell you what I never could tell Grandpa Betts. *You* are a gentleman, and he, though the best of men, is not. See here: Anne has done something very foolish indeed, I do not doubt; but it has been all done for spite, and nothing more."

"Spite against whom?"

"Against James, and against me," she said. "You see," she added, blushing, laughing, and gently taking his arm, "I have monopolized James, and she wanted to monopolize him herself. She has done something very violent and foolish in her anger, for she has a sad temper, but nothing in the least degree wrong."

"But Reginald?"

"Reginald and she have quarrelled for the last time, that is all," said Dora. "They never did anything else. They never would have got on together."

"You give me some hope and comfort, my love," said Sugden. "I cannot help believing you while I hear your voice; but my reason is against you."

"Oh, indeed. Where did we get this report?"

"From Mr. Kriegsturm."

"Mr. Kriegsturm: a pretty authority! And one would be glad to hear Miss Heathton's account of the matter. Has she run away too?"

"That is a shrewd remark," said Sugden.

"Now, I am going to ask you a favour. Let us get the dogs, and go round the old place for the last time."

"Why for the last time?" said Sugden, when they had called

the bloodhounds together, and started down the drive towards the forest.

"You only half quote what I said, and alter my emphasis. I *said* over the *old* place for the last time. The *old* place is no more. In less than an hour there will be a new Silcotes."

"It is true, and a more happy one," said Sugden.

"Well," said Dora, "I don't know; I actually *do not* know. I remember once that Miss Lee read us that fairy story, I forget which (it is often enough quoted), which ends, 'And so they all lived happy ever afterwards;' and Anne remarked emphatically, 'Dear me, how exceedingly tiresome they must have found it, after such a delightful series of accidents and quarrels.' Do you know that I have been happier in this old house than ever I expect to be again? There, what do you think of that, for instance?"

"There is some reason in it, or you would not have said it, my dear," replied Sugden. "Why do you think so?"

"Well, Uncle Sugden (I am not quite sure yet whether you are my uncle or my aunt—*n'importe*; Grandpa Silcote is the fountain of honour, and must settle the titles of the new court), I will tell *you* why. My dear, in old times this house was a very charming one. There was a perfectly delicious *abandon* about it, the like of which I have never seen, or even heard of, elsewhere. Coming as I did from the squalor of my father's house, this was a fairy palace for me. True, there was an ogre; my grandfather Silcote was the ogre; but then I liked ogres. There was a somewhat cracked princess—a real Italian princess—in velvet and jewels; and I like people of that kind. Then there was a dark story, which we never could understand, which was to us infinitely charming; there was almost barbarous profusion and ostentation, which *everybody*—I don't care—*everybody* loves in their heart of hearts; there were these bloodhounds which I hated at first, as a cockney, but which I have got to love as the last remnants of the *ancien régime*; there were horses, grooms, carriages, ponies, deer, as indeed there are now, with all their charm gone; and lastly, one could do exactly as one liked: one could revel in all this luxury and beauty, set here like a splendid jewel among the surrounding forest, without a soul to control one. And this was very charming, for *I* am a Radical."

"It was an evil and perverse state of things, my love," said Sugden.

"I dare say," said Dora; "but then I am evil and perverse, and I loved it. I used to protest against it; that was my prudishness. But now that it has all passed away, I know that I loved it."

"You are quite sure, then, that the old state of things *has* passed away," said Sugden.

"My good—distant relation (I will not commit myself)—do you know that you are perfectly foolish at times? Is not my Uncle Arthur going to marry my old governess, Miss Lee? Are they not going to take up their abode here at Silcotes? You have heard of this arrangement, because I have heard you speak of it."

"Then you think," said Sugden, "that Mr. Arthur and his bride will be inclined to look round and put things square."

Dora only looked at him at first. Her opinion was so strong as to the way in which these two would "put things square," that she did not trust herself to speak of it at present. She as good as passed the question for a time.

"There is a chance that your sister, my aunt Mrs. Thomas Silcote, or, to be more correct, *Mrs.* Silcote, may be able to do battle with them single-handed. She is in high favour at headquarters now, and is likely to remain so. She is an energetic and courageous woman, and it seems has great influence over grandpa. But she is one, and they are two, and she will have her work cut out for her. She will fight like a dragon for James, but James will be of no assistance to her at all. The Arthur Silcotes will beat her if she don't mind. However, we shall have a happy little household."

"My dear Dora," said Sugden, "you are very worldly."

"I am; I have seen the consequences of not being worldly, and, Uncle Sugden, I was trained in a hard school. I only know this, that I shall make James stick to his art, and be independent, for with this wonderful new happy family arrangement, I see nothing to prevent his being cut out of his grandfather's will to-morrow."

"He will have his mother's money—four thousand a year."

"I know that. But it is an evil thing for a man to wait for his mother's money. He shall be independent of that before his mother dies, if I know my own will."

"You are taking a black view of things."

"I have been used to the darker side of things. I will be more cheerful directly. Let us see what has become of our old Silcotes, in this newer and happier *régime*. The delightful old *abandon* of the house is gone for ever. Grandpa, our ogre, has forgotten his ways. Altogether, the old house will never be what it was before. I know that the new order will be better than the old, but I am wicked and perverse, and I hate it."

"You have *talked* yourself into hating it, Dora," said Sugden, "with what seems to me a great deal of common sense."

"Well, I do hate it at all events," said Dora. "They will spoil James himself among them."

They had come in their walk before the silent cottage, in which Sugden and his sister had lived for so many years. The fence was broken, and the bloodhounds which accompanied them had invaded the garden. The flowers, mostly spring flowers which Sugden had planted so many years ago, were all out of flower, and lying withered on the neglected ground, with the exception of two groups of noble white lilies, which stood on each side of the door, and a rose which they now chose to call the "John Hopper," but which old-fashioned folks call the "Cabbage."

"Get me a lily," said Dora.

"I think that I will get you a rose instead," said Sugden. "Old maids wear lilies."

So they turned into the main avenue again, with the stupid bloodhounds round them, snuffing and scratching among the rabbit burrows.

"Little woman," said Sugden, "you have a melancholy sort of mind."

"It is likely enough," said Dora; "I watched my father's life, and saw him die. It is likely enough that my mind is a melancholy one."

"You have made *me* melancholy enough; and I looked for such pleasure from to-day's meeting. When your aunt and I lived alone and unnoticed at that cottage we have just left, we were happy enough. We never had as much to eat as we could have eaten, and we felt the want of firing also—bitterly, I can tell you. We had our great sorrow—the desertion of her, unrecognised by the poor fellow who is just gone; we had to stand all weathers, and never had five shillings in the house; yet we bore it all cheerfully. Just now, when I believed that all things were changed for the better, and we were going to begin a time of prosperity, you point out to me a hundred new miseries fifty times worse than the old ones. I doubt you are a killjoy, Miss Dora."

"Well," said Dora, "it does not much matter. I shall die an old maid. I always intended to be so, and I mean to be so: and I am a very deter—— Why, bless me, it *is* you."

"That looks very like old maidenhood," said Sugden, as he saw her fairly in the arms of a tall and very handsome young man, with a dark downy moustache, and—I must write it down—getting kissed. "That looks uncommonly like dying an old maid. Bah! you're just like the rest of your precious family—saying one thing and doing another. My boy James shall hear of this. I had better make myself scarce, for this is getting too tender for me—

this is. Why, that can't be the boy himself? He never had moustaches. I am blessed if I don't believe it is, though. Here, you two people, manners! manners!"

"Who cares about manners before *you*?" said James, and Sugden saw that it *was* James at once.

"I thought old maids were particular in that respect," replied Sugden. "However, have it your own way, and don't regard me."

"If you don't hold your tongue, I'll kiss you," said Dora.

"Then here goes," said Sugden. "Arthur is going——" but she executed her terrible threat, and silenced him. "For," as she said, "no one ever cared one halfpenny for *you*. You are of as much importance as an old milestone."

When James had got hold of one of his arms, and Dora of another—when they both clung round him and looked into his gentle, almost stupid face, Sugden thought that to be a milestone was not such a bad thing after all, if one had two such beautiful young climbers to twine around you.

"They will be here directly," said James. "I came across the fields from Twyford and have beaten them, but they will be here directly."

"Shall we wait for them here, or go back to the hall?" said Dora.

"Let us hurry back to the hall," said James. "He would like it better."

"Is he in one of his tempers, then?" asked Dora.

"No, he has no tempers now. But I think he would like it. And Aunt Mary is mad."

CHAPTER LXI.

THE RETURN.

THEY hurried back, and got under the shelter of the great porch, ready to receive the comers from the war, and to see the end of the ancient and the beginning of the modern history of the Silcote family.

"The girl is right," thought Sugden; "the new misery is greater than the old. Well, here they come."

Two carriages came grinding through the gravel up to the porch—the first closed, the second open. The closed carriage stopped

first at their feet, and the butler opened the door of it. Silcote himself got out of it first, looking very quiet and very solemn indeed, taking notice of no one : and then turned round to hand out his companion, the poor Princess of Castelnuovo.

She put her well-formed hand on his arm, and, with her finely-formed little foot carefully pointed, alit gently and dexterously on the lowest step before the porch. Then she turned to Silcote, smiled pleasantly and bowed. After this, she stood in the full blaze of the sunshine, and looked around her. She was beautifully and carefully dressed, and almost hung with jewels, all put on in the most perfect taste. Her beauty, old as she was, was still splendid : and yet, when Dora had looked on her for less than half a minute, she slipped quietly away and hid herself in one of the window-seats, saying to herself,—“ She had better have died. It would be better for her if she was dead.”

For that had happened to this poor Princess which is more inexplicable, and infinitely more awful, than death itself. She was mad. She had overstepped Kriegsthum's line at last. Mystery greater than death ! The old familiar world, the old familiar house, the people with whom she had lived for so many years, were all around her, and yet she was utterly unable to recognise them. She *saw* them as she had seen them a hundred times before ; yet they were other places and other people to her. It is beyond all thought and all knowledge. Better perhaps not to think of this awful death in life, or double life, but go with the doctors, who name it as “ tubercular disease of the brain,” and then put it on one side ; which is possibly the best thing to do.

In the sun, before the door, stood a handsome, well-dressed woman, before the eyes of men calm, polite, *bien mise*, everything which was to be desired. And yet there was no woman there at all, for the soul had gone out of her, and she saw things which were not. Her intelligence lied to her eyes, and her eyes to her intelligence. This mystery of madness is surely the greatest mystery of all. See it in one you have loved, and then contradict me.

She did not know her own brother, and she did not know the old house ; still she knew that she was mad. She believed that her brother was the doctor, and that this was the asylum. Yet by some infinitely deep cross purpose in her soul she struggled towards the surface of reason for an instant. She turned to the butler, and said, “ Colonel Silcote has missed the train, and will not be in time for dinner. He will have his old room in the west wing.”

And then she passed under the shadow of the porch and into

the old hall, where the bloodhounds lay about ; and Dora, looking from her dim window-seat, saw her stalk along, imperial, majestic, with her face set, with uneasy lips, with eyebrows drawn together, and with staring eyes, which saw what was not there.

But by this time the second carriage had unloaded itself.

The meeting between Miss Lee and Dora had something of humour in it. Dora had never thoroughly *liked* Miss Lee, and had seen and remembered a very great many indiscretions which Miss Lee, under present circumstances, would have liked her to forget. Yet Dora had not forgotten them, and Miss Lee knew it. They were, therefore, both on their dignity. When the poor Princess and her brother had passed her in the hall, she came out in the porch, and met her old friend-enemy, Miss Lee, face to face.

Miss Lee was dressed up to the point which is expected of every lady with four thousand a year ; and Dora, having been dependent on Mr. Betts, by no means a liberal outgiver, was somewhat dowdy and shabby. Yet Dora held the key of the position in her pocket, and knew it, as did likewise Miss Lee herself.

"How do you do, my dear Dora?" said Miss Lee.

"How do you do, Miss Lee?" said Dora, looking very calmly at her.

"I am very well, indeed, my dear Dora," said Miss Lee.

"I am exceedingly glad to hear it," said Dora. "I am afraid that your nerves must have been shaken by the war."

"Not at all," said Miss Lee. And then there was a pause. Dora would have died sooner than have spoken next, and, to tell the truth, not only Miss Raylock, but Arthur himself, remained perfectly silent ; "for," as Miss Raylock expressed it, "Miss Lee had been giving herself airs."

Miss Lee had to speak first, accordingly. "My dear," she said, "will you give me a kiss?"

"With the greatest pleasure," replied Dora.

"I hope we shall be very great friends, Dora."

"I am sure I hope we shall," was the reply.

CONCLUSION.

So comes one long story to an end. Nothing remains but to give the various characters their departure, and to finish one of the most difficult efforts of story-telling ever attempted.

I hear people asking about such and such a story, "Does it end well?" as if that mattered. How can a story of deceit, folly, and selfishness like this *end* entirely well? It ends as well as it can. As people make their beds, so they must lie on them.

Silcote by degrees became possessed of all the circumstances with which our reader is already acquainted, with regard to his relations with his wife, which were chiefly brought about through the foolishness of his poor sister. Kriegsthurm, having been forced back to England, in consequence of the danger incurred from the continental democrats, took a house in Camden Town, and, being rather short of cash, wrote to Silcote, offering to tell him the whole truth, from beginning to end. Silcote went to him at once, and learnt from him and his head-agent in the villainy, all the details. He paid him his money, asking him if he did not think himself the greatest scoundrel in Europe? To which Kriegsthurm answered, "No, not by many degrees;" and laughed.

Silcote was now aware that he had by his insane jealousy and reticence caused the death of a good and gentle woman, and of an innocent and tender wife. He spoke to Mrs. Tom Silcote in strong language of the never-dying remorse which such a discovery would entail; yet that remorse was very little visible after all, from a variety of reasons.

If he had been still alone, still isolated from human sympathies, no doubt that remorse would have been very great—nay, it was relatively very great. He would probably have maddened himself into some new phase of folly with it. But many circumstances prevented his doing this, which it would be well to consider.

The business was so very, very old. Above forty years old. Very few men are capable of feeling acute *remorse* for actions done so long ago, although they may use excited language about them, as did Silcote. To feel remorse acutely, the image of the victim or the sin must be close to the mind's eye; at least, closer than a space of from forty to fifty years. He still had a great tenderness for his poor wife, but he was getting old: it was very long ago; and his love for her had been turned into furious,

and as he thought righteous, indignation against her for so many years, that he was unable to obliterate the half century during which he had regarded her as a monster of wickedness, and take up his love for her again as fresh as ever. He was unable to carry out the ideal programme which he had announced to Mrs. Thomas. He was regretful and repentant. But of practical acute *remorse*, with its usual symptoms, there was none.

There were other reasons against this phase of mind : almost innumerable. The break in his habits, when he had left his unnatural solitude to go into the very thickest of the first of these newly-invented, sudden bloody, and decisive wars, had somewhat dazed him and put old matters very far away indeed. He had, again, been very fond of his son Thomas, and had always, in his heart of hearts, thought of a reconciliation between them as a matter of course. He had pursued him under fire with the intention of being reconciled to him, and had found him lying stark, stiff, and stone-dead under the poplars by the mill wall at Montriolo, watched by his half-crazed aunt and his unacknowledged son. This alone was enough to put old disasters out of his mind.

Then, again, Anne. He had been very fond of Anne ; and had, in his newly-awakened recklessness, sent her abroad with a somewhat foolish governess. In despite of Dora's purely imaginary defence of her (which did Dora great credit), Anne had made an awful *fiasco*. She had turned Roman Catholic in order to be married to the young Roman gentleman whom Kriegsthum, in one of his puzzled fits, had set on to watch James, and was figuring away at Naples with him, with the money which had been entrusted to Miss Heathton, her governess, for their mutual subsistence. Reginald and she had had an interview, previous to her escapade, in which she told Reginald that she had never cared for him in the least, but was in love with James, and always had been. After which she went to Naples, as we have seen ; and Reginald having no one to direct him, went to Innspruck,—why or wherefore we shall never know,—and wrote to his grandfather from that place, telling him that he had carefully examined the various relations in which he stood to his fellow-men, that he had arranged to commit suicide, and that by the time these lines reached him (the distracted Squire), he, Reginald, should be no more.

He did not do anything of the kind, but exhibited a feeble, pretty picture at the Dudley last year. Still Silcote, having believed in his own nonsense for so many years, was able to believe in Reginald's. This, however, was one of the smallest of

his troubles. Any one, no matter how sensitive, would have forgotten an old trouble, on the basis of which this story has been written, in the face of the new troubles which arose and confronted him on every side.

It is extremely disagreeable to me to allude to such a half-reputable *fiasco* as that of Anne. I do not deal in such wares; you must go elsewhere for them; but it is still more disagreeable for me, a man whose principal desire is to please, to allude to the relations between Mrs. Thomas Silcote (Mrs. Sugden) and Mrs. Arthur Silcote (Miss Lee).

As long as they were mere cousins and co-heiresses they got on capitally together. They were both extremely High Church, took in the same paper, and understood one another perfectly. Nothing could be more perfect than their *accord*.

Then came in Arthur: of the liberal Oxford minority, who had, to tell the plain truth, pitched Miss Lee overboard, until she got her fortune. Miss Lee was very rapidly converted into *his* views, as Dora had often prophesied. But, then, Mrs. Tom Silcote stuck to her High Churchism in the most strenuous manner. There never was such a difference in this world. It was two to one against Mrs. Thomas, for Miss Lee had gone over to the enemy. Everything which Arthur said she swore to. It was no use for Mrs. Thomas to "taunt" her with previously-expressed opinions. Mrs. Arthur replied merely that she knew better now.

And, again, there was something between these ladies which was possibly more important than any merely religious difference. It was the question of the succession to Silcote's enormous wealth. Arthur, as an independent bachelor, was one person: Arthur married, with his announcement out to the whole county of a probable heir, was quite another person. While a bachelor, in precarious health, he could well afford to pooh-pooh his father's intention of making him heir: he spoke sincerely when he rudely declined the honour. But, now, with a showy and beautiful wife, of whom he was proud, and who took him into society, things were very different. He began to feel the value of the prestige which a beautiful and rich wife gives a man, and to be less and less patient of the idea of living principally on her money. And Silcotes was one of the finest places in the county, and she was naturally mistress of it—would certainly be, according to his father's present will, could he only undermine Mrs. Thomas's enormous influence with his father, which was now greater than his own.

As for Mrs. Thomas, she was perfectly determined that James

should marry Dora, and that the Thomas Silcote and the Algernon Silcote interests should coincide, and bring James in triumphantly as master of Silcotes. To further this object she persistently kept the Squire's old grievances before him. She continually, though with the finest tact, urged the claims of Dora, the child of his ill-used son Algernon, upon him, and gently and calmly laid the death of Thomas Silcote at his doorstep, as she had done in sober earnest at the battle of Palestro. Her case was a very strong one, and she was quite a match for Arthur.

Now, seeing that these people all lived in the same house together for over a year at the Squire's expense, and that they were all of them very resolute people, and that they were always, night or day, ready for one another, it is no wonder that at the end of a twelve-month the Squire had so far forgotten his old life in this new one as to consult Betts about the best route to Australia, affirming positively that he could stand it no longer, and should emigrate.

"What part of Australia do you want to go to?" asked Betts.

"Don't know," said Silcote. "I only want to get out of this."

"If you can't tell me where you want to go, I can't give you the route," said Betts. "But drop allegory; you want to get out of all this, and I don't wonder. Which party do you wish hoisted out? There!"

Silcote could be downright as well as Betts. "Arthur and his wife," he replied.

Betts whistled. "You are a bold man, Squire. There is life in the old hound yet. Why?"

"Because I cannot do without Mrs. Tom. I want to end my life with her. And I don't like Arthur and his wife; they are far too fine for me. They are beginning to give dinner parties here now, and show me off like a bear which *they* have tamed, and I am etcetera'd if I stand it. Tom's wife is worth fifty of them."

"Who is to have Silcotes?" asked Betts.

Silcote replied, "That is a home question."

"So it is," said Betts. "I can't help you until it is answered, though."

"Well then, James and Dora," said Silcote; and that is what makes the business so intolerable. I will provide for Arthur splendidly—at once if he wishes it; but Tom's son and Algernon's daughter shall have Silcotes. You may call me a fool if you like, but so it will be."

"I don't call you a fool," said Betts; "I think you are doing wisely and well."

"But how am I to get rid of Arthur?"

"Why—let me see; he is out shooting now; wait till he comes home, and tell him of the determination you have come to."

"I dare not," said the Squire.

"*You must,*" said Betts. "*You shall.* If you don't, I will; and so I do not deceive you."

"But how?" said Silcote.

"Announce to him the immediate marriage of James and Dora," replied *πολυμήτις* Betts; "then explain this matter to him, and immediately afterwards have those two married, just to show you are in earnest."

"They are full young," said the Squire.

"None too young, and they have plenty of money. Lor' bless you! carpenters and blacksmiths, and such people, habitually marry at that age without a week's wages to the good. You can knock 'em up a couple of thousand a year amongst you. Let 'em marry at once. Put your hand to the prettiest thing ever done. Let us see one more beautiful thing before we die, Silcote. We have seen but few pretty things in our lifetime: let us see one more before we take to the chimney corner on our way to the churchyard. Come, my good old friend, put a rose in your button-hole, and let us have this wedding. Youth is past for ever with both of us, but let us feel young once more, vicariously. Let this thing be."

"But Arthur?"

"Hang Arthur. Why, you are worth six of Arthur any day of the week. You have sufficient manhood to make a fool of yourself, and I'll be hanged if he has. Algy was worth a dozen of him, and so was Tom. There he is, coming in from shooting. Go down to him. Tell him of your intentions and announce the marriage."

"But we have not consulted James and Dora," said the Squire.

"Pish!" said Betts, "go. Don't be a coward."

Arthur, on being informed that his father had been long thinking of his domestic arrangements, and after that long thinking had come to the conclusion that the best thing he could do was to make over to Arthur 118,000*l.* in the funds, and leave the reversion of Silcotes to his grandson James was furiously, though silently indignant. No one could possibly have behaved more perfectly than Arthur under this heavy dispensation of Providence of nearly 4,000*l.* a year down on the nail. The attitude of himself and his wife at dinner that day was that of

politeness under an injury : an injury too great to be mentioned. This announcement meant a notice to quit, and they understood it as such. They discovered that they had an engagement to go to Lord Hainault the next morning, and stopped all conversation by persistent silence. The way in which they shook the dust off their feet, in stepping into their carriage next morning, and leaving this perfidious mansion, was, to say the least of it, "genteel." Yet they went, and there was peace ; Silcote said, "triumph."

The Princess lived the rest of her life with her brother in peace. She was very gentle, quiet, and obliging, and it was only known to very few even in the household that anything was wrong. It only showed itself in one way. She kept with her own hands a room ready for the arrival of poor Colonel Silcote. It was the old room he had had when a boy, and was hung round with his guns, swords, and cricket-bats. Here she waited for his arrival, coming into his room several times a day to see if everything was ready, and always looking in the first thing in the morning, to see if he had come in the night and was in bed. With this not unhappy delusion the time wore on with her peacefully, although he never came.

THE END.

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